

WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES (2017)

- Released by July 14th, 2017
- 2 hours 20 minutes
- \$150,000,000 (estimated) budget
- Matt Reeves directed
- Chernin Entertainment, TSG Entertainment
- Rated PG-13 for sequences of sci-fi violence and action, thematic elements, and some disturbing images

QUICK THOUGHTS:

- Demetri Panos:
- OPINION: WITH MATT REEVES FLOURISHED STORYTELLING, QUALITY PERFORMANCES, GRAND SCALE NARRATIVE; WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES CAPS OFF A RARE TRILOGY FEAT WHERE THE MOVIES JUST GOT BETTER AS THEY WENT ALONG. REEVES NOT ONLY ABLE TO DIRECT BIG SCALE ACTION, HE COMPOSES SHOTS THAT NOT ONLY CAPTURE INTIMATE EXPRESSION BUT GRAND SCALE LANDSCAPE. SPEAKING OF EXPRESSION; MOTION CAPTURE TECHNOLOGY IS REACHING IF NOT AT ITS PEAK! I ARGUE THAT IT IS SO GOOD, IT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A PROSTHETIC. TO TAKE THAT ONE STEP FURTHER, THE ACADEMY SHOULD NOW TAKE NOTE AND NOT BE HINDERED TO NOTICE PERFORMANCES UNDER MOTION CAPTURE. IT IS NOT UNLIKE NOMINATING JOHN HURT FROM ELEPHANT MAN OR ERIC STOLTZ FROM MASK. ANDY SERKIS PERFORMANCE HERE TRANSCENDS THE MASK. HE PLAYS CEASAR AS A LEADER WHO NOT ONLY GRAPPLES WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIS RACE BUT WITH RAMIFICATIONS OF HIS DECISIONS. HIS IS A GRIPPING PERFORMANCE, ONE OF THE BEST OF THE SUMMER. WOODY HARRELSON'S, THE COLONEL, PERFORMANCE TEETERS FROM GOING OVER THE TOP BUT HIS CHARACTER MIRRORS REAL LIFE PERSONAS, WHILE ONE CAN UNDERSTAND THE COLONEL'S MOTIVATION, HIS ACTIONS ARE NOT THOSE BOUND BY RATIONALITY AND THEREFORE SCARY. ALSO, PROPS TO AMIAH MILLER WHOSE RE-IMAGINED NOVA IS ENDEARING AND STRONG. WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES WRAPS UP CEASARS STORY WITH RESPECT. IT PROVIDES QUALITY SCIENCE FICTION ENTERTAINMENT THAT MIRRORS CURRENT SOCIETY WITHOUT BEATING AN AUDIENCE OVER THE HEAD BECAUSE IT REMEMBERS TO ENTERTAIN FIRST.
- Phil Svitek

DEVELOPMENT

- After seeing his cut of *Dawn*, [20th Century Fox](#) and [Chernin Entertainment](#) signed [Matt Reeves](#) to return as director for a third installment of the reboot series
- In January 2014, the studio announced a third installment with Reeves returning to direct and co-write along with Bombback, and Peter Chernin, Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver serving as producers
- During an interview in mid-November 2014 with [MTV](#), Andy Serkis said they did not know the next film's setting. "...It could be five years after the event. It could be the night after the events of where we left '*Dawn*.'"
- In May 2015, the title was first given as *War of the Planet of the Apes*

WRITING (Mark Bombback, Matt Reeves)

- Mark Bombback was born on August 29, 1971 in New Rochelle, New York, USA. He is a writer and producer, known for [Live Free or Die Hard](#) (2007), [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014) and [The Wolverine](#) (2013)
- When director Reeves and screenwriter Bombback came on board to helm *Dawn*, the film already had a release date, which led to an accelerated production schedule
- However, with the third installment, Fox wanted to give the duo plenty of time to write and make the film. Taking advantage of this, the two bonded with each other more than before

- In interviews for *Dawn*, Reeves talked a bit about the inevitable war Caesar would have with the humans: "As this story continues, we know that war is not avoided by the end of *Dawn*. That is going to take us into the world of what he is grappling with. Where he is going to be thrust into circumstances that he never, ever wanted to deal with, and was hoping he could avoid. And now he is right in the middle of it. The things that happen in that story test him in huge ways, in the ways in which his relationship with Koba haunts him deeply. It's going to be an epic story. I think you've probably read that I sort of described it where in the first film was very much about his rise from humble beginnings to being a revolutionary. The second movie was about having to rise to the challenge of being a great leader in the most difficult of times. This is going to be the story that is going to cement his status as a seminal figure in ape history, and sort of leads to an almost biblical status. He is going to become like a mythic ape figure, like [Moses](#)."
- At [New York Comic-Con](#) 2016, Reeves explained that he and Bombback were influenced by many films before writing. He said, "One of the first things that Mark and I did because we had just finished *Dawn* was that we decided to watch a million movies. We decided to do what people fantasize what Hollywood screenwriters get to do but no one actually does. We got Fox to give us a theater and we watched movie after movie. We watched every *Planet of the Apes* movie, war movies, westerns, [Empire Strikes Back](#)... We just thought, 'We have to pretend we have all the time in the world,' even though we had limited time. We got really inspired."
- Another comparison is when Caesar sets off on a journey to find the Colonel, flanked by a posse of close friends – a situation Reeves explicitly ties to [Clint Eastwood](#)'s war-weary soldier in [The Outlaw Josey Wales](#)
- Influences from the film [Apocalypse Now](#), notably Woody Harrelson's character the Colonel and his Alpha-Omega faction being similar to [Colonel Kurtz](#)'s renegade army, were also noted by several journalists
- While promoting [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014), [Andy Serkis](#) was asked if the AIZ-113 drug had also affected apes outside of Caesar's tribe. [Matt Reeves](#) and co-writer [Mark Bombback](#) took note of this, which led to the introduction of Bad Ape in this film

STORY/TOPICS

CAST:

- In August 2015, [Deadline](#) reported that [Gabriel Chavarria](#) was cast as one of the humans in the film
- In September 2015, [The Hollywood Reporter](#) announced that [Woody Harrelson](#) had been cast as the film's antagonist, and that Chavarria's role was small
- In October 2015, [TheWrap](#) reported that [Steve Zahn](#) was cast as a new ape in the film, retitled as *War for the Planet of the Apes*
- It was also announced that young actress Amiah Miller was cast as one of the film's humans, with [Judy Greer](#) and [Karin Konoval](#) reprising their roles as Cornelia and Maurice, while [Aleks Paunovic](#) and [Sara Canning](#) were cast as the new apes.

Apes

- [Andy Serkis](#) as [Caesar](#), an intelligent [common chimpanzee](#) who is leader to a tribe of genetically enhanced apes
 - Andy Serkis is an English film actor, director and author. He is best known for his performance capture roles comprising motion capture acting, animation and voice work for such computer-generated characters as Gollum in The Lord of the Rings film trilogy (2001-2003) and [The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey](#) (2012), the eponymous King Kong in the 2005 film, Caesar in [Rise](#) (2011) and [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014), Captain Haddock / Sir Francis Haddock in Steven Spielberg's [The Adventures of Tintin](#)(2011) and Supreme Leader Snoke in [Star Wars: The Force Awakens](#) (2015)

- Serkis also earned a Golden Globe Award nomination for his portrayal of serial killer Ian Brady in the British television film [Longford](#) (2006) and was nominated for a BAFTA Award for his portrayal of new wave and punk rock musician Ian Dury in the biopic [Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll](#) (2010). In 2015, he had a small role in [Avengers: Age of Ultron](#) (2015). Serkis has his own motion capture workshop, The Imaginarium Studios in London, which he will use for his directorial debut, [Jungle Book](#) (2018)
- [Steve Zahn](#) as "Bad Ape", a common chimpanzee who lived in a zoo before the Simian Flu outbreak and was a hermit before joining Caesar's group
 - Steve Zahn was born in Marshall, Minnesota, to Zelda, who worked at a YMCA, and Carleton Edward Zahn, a Lutheran pastor. His father is of German and Swedish descent and his mother is of German ancestry. Zahn's career kicked off in his native Minnesota when he crashed the audition of a local stage production of "Biloxi Blues" and won the lead role. Next trained at American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, MA; then moved to New York City where he won a role touring for 13 months in national company of [Tommy Tune](#)-directed version of "Bye Bye Birdie". Back in New York, he played opposite [Ethan Hawke](#) in "Sophistry" at Playwright's Horizon, where [Ben Stiller](#) noticed him and cast him and Hawke in [Reality Bites](#) (1994)
 - [Steve Zahn](#) admitted in a Film4 interview that he cried after seeing the completed film for the first time as he was so moved by it
- [Karin Konoval](#) as Maurice, a wise and benevolent [Bornean orangutan](#) who is Caesar's adviser.
- [Terry Notary](#) as Rocket, a common chimpanzee who is Caesar's brother-figure.
- [Ty Olsson](#) as Red, a [Western lowland gorilla](#) who was once a follower of Koba, now serving the Colonel to defeat Caesar. Olsson previously played Chief Hamill in [Rise](#).
- [Michael Adamthwaite](#) as Luca, a Western lowland gorilla in Caesar's tribe.
- [Toby Kebbell](#) reprises his role as Koba from [Dawn](#), appearing in Caesar's hallucinations
 - [Toby Kebbell](#), who portrayed Koba in *Dawn*, has expressed interest in reprising his role or performing as other characters. Plans to include Koba in a larger role in the film were abandoned early, with Bombback saying, "If you stayed until the very end of *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, you hear Koba's breathing. We did that to give us a tiny crack of a possibility that we could revive Koba if we wanted to. Very early on in spitballing, we realized there was nothing more to do with Koba – certainly nothing that would exceed what he had done in the last story. But we knew we wanted to keep him alive as an idea. In playing out the reality of what happened at the end of the last film, Caesar would be traumatized by having to kill his brother. That would have resonance, and we wanted to make sure that didn't get lost. So the answer was that we could go inside Caesar's mind at this point and revisit Koba that way."
- [Judy Greer](#) as Cornelia, Caesar's wife.
- [Sara Canning](#) as Lake, a common chimpanzee in Caesar's tribe, who's also Blue Eyes' mate and later Cornelius's caretaker.
- Max Lloyd-Jones as Blue Eyes, Caesar and Cornelia's oldest son
- [Devyn Dalton](#) as Cornelius, Caesar and Cornelia's youngest son and Blue Eyes's younger brother. Dalton previously played Cornelia in *Rise*.
- [Aleks Paunovic](#) as Winter, an [albino](#) Western lowland gorilla in Caesar's tribe who sided with the Colonel out of fear

Humans

- [Woody Harrelson](#) as The Colonel, the iron-fisted leader of the paramilitary organization Alpha-Omega who is obsessed with wiping out Caesar and his tribe to preserve his people's role as the dominant species

- Academy Award-nominated and Emmy Award-winning actor Woodrow Tracy Harrelson was born on July 23, 1961 in Midland, Texas, to Diane Lou (Oswald) and [Charles Harrelson](#). He grew up in Lebanon, Ohio, and, after receiving degrees in theater arts and English from Hanover College, had a brief stint in New York theater. He was soon cast as Woody on TV series [Cheers](#) (1982), which wound up being one of the most-popular TV shows ever and also earned Harrelson an Emmy for his performance in 1989.
- While he dabbled in film during his time on [Cheers](#) (1982), that area of his career didn't fully take off until towards the end of the show's run. In 1991, [Doc Hollywood](#) (1991) gave him his first widely-seen movie role, and he followed that up with [White Men Can't Jump](#) (1992), [Indecent Proposal](#) (1993) and [Natural Born Killers](#) (1994). More recently, Harrelson was seen in [No Country for Old Men](#) (2007), [Zombieland](#) (2009), [2012](#) (2009), and [Friends with Benefits](#) (2011), along with the acclaimed HBO movie [Game Change](#)(2012).
- In 2011, Harrelson snagged the coveted role of fan-favorite drunk Haymitch Abernathy in the big-screen adaptation of [The Hunger Games](#) (2012), which ended up being one of the highest-grossing movies ever at the domestic box office. Harrelson is set to reprise that role for the sequels, which are scheduled for release in November 2013, 2014 and 2015. Harrelson has received two Academy Award nominations, first for his role as controversial Hustler founder [Larry Flynt](#) in [The People vs. Larry Flynt](#) (1996) and then for a role in [The Messenger](#) (2009). He also received Golden Globe nominations for both of these parts. In 2016, he had a stand-out role as a wise teacher in the teen drama [The Edge of Seventeen](#) (2016).
- According to [Matt Reeves](#) it was [Woody Harrelson's](#) idea to begin addressing Caesar by ticking off the military rivals of the past "Wellington and Napoleon, Grant and Lee, Custer and Sitting Bull" while noting that as an ape Caesar would not know what he was talking about
- Amiah Miller as Nova, a bold and kind mute orphan whom Maurice adopts as his daughter
 - The little girl named Nova is named after the character played by Linda Harrison in the first and second films in the original franchise
- [Gabriel Chavarria](#) as Preacher, a human soldier working under the Colonel in Alpha-Omega

SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS

- According to director [Matt Reeves](#), the apes that serve the humans are called "Donkeys", both as a reference to Donkey Kong and like donkeys, they are used as pack animals
- In the first film, [Rise of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2011), Caesar could only utter a few words, most notably "No!" In the second film, [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014), his vocabulary had greatly increased, able to speak in nearly full sentences with syntax and grammar, but still with a rough tone and cadence to his voice. In this film, he is able to speak nearly identical to what a human can produce, indicating his growth into personhood
- According to director Matt Reeves, the name of the group of rebelling humans are the Alpha & Omega, a reference to the bomb the mutants worshiped in Beneath the Planet of the Apes. The logo on their helmets and flag matches the original logo on the bomb
- Caesar's son shares his name with the Roddy McDowall character in the original film: Cornelius. Ironically, in the original film series Caesar is the son of Cornelius, eventually naming his own son Cornelius after his father
- The name of the group Alpha Omega and their motto "We Are the Beginning and the End" refers to the Greek alphabet where the letter Alpha is the first one in the series and the letter Omega is the last one. Furthermore, there is a Greek expression roughly translated as "The alpha and the omega of everything" meaning that if something stands between the beginning (alpha) and the end (omega) then it includes everything

- The mutation of the simian flu virus rendering the surviving humans mute and mindless is a foreshadowing of the events in the original [Planet of the Apes](#) (1968) in which the surviving human population is mute and primitive
- The ending of the film contains references to the canon of the original film series. Before Caesar dies, Maurice (an orangutan) promises that he will tell Caesar's story to his surviving son. In the original series, the legacy of Caesar after his death is preserved by an orangutan known as "The Lawgiver", played by [John Huston](#) in [Battle for the Planet of the Apes](#) (1973), and afterward the orangutans become the learned politicians and religious leaders of ape society, revering the memory of The Lawgiver in statues after Caesar has been forgotten. The plot of [Planet of the Apes](#) (1968) hinges on the orangutans having taught apes a false history of the world and erasing knowledge that humankind once was the dominant species of Earth
- The film contains a lot of references to the Bible. Caesar, being the apes savior is at one point crucified on a X shape, known as St. Andrew's cross, and is given drink in a disrespectful fashion reminiscent to the crucifixion of Jesus. There also parallels to the story of Moses as Caesar frees the apes from being slaves, guides them to a new "promised land" but does before entering it
- At the final shot of this film following Caesar's death, on the upper right hand corner, a small spec is shooting upwards like a shooting star. This is speculated to be Colonel Taylor's spaceship passing by earth

DIRECTING (Matt Reeves)

- During production Reeves and Bomback sought broader inspirations from films like [Bridge on the River Kwai](#) and [The Great Escape](#). Feeling that there was a need to imbue Biblical themes and elements, they also watched Biblical epics like [Ben-Hur](#) and [The Ten Commandments](#). The influences and inspirations were made evident in the relationship between Caesar and [Woody Harrelson](#)'s Colonel, a military leader with vague pretensions toward godhood, which Reeves compares their relationship to the dynamic between [Alec Guinness](#)'s British Commander and [Sessue Hayakawa](#) prison camp Colonel in [Bridge on the River Kwai](#)
- Born on April 27, 1966, Matthew Reeves is a writer, director and producer, known for his directorial work on [Cloverfield](#) (2008), [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014), and [War of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2017). Reeves was born in Rockville Center, New York and was childhood friends with director J.J.Abrams. Following his studies at the University of Southern California, he landed his breakout role as director of [Cloverfield](#) in 2008 which was produced by his long time friend, Abrams. Reeves later went on to direct [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) in 2014 and is set to return as director for the third installment in the franchise, [War of the Planet of the Apes](#) in 2017.

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Michael Seresin)

- Michael Seresin was born on July 17, 1942 in Wellington, New Zealand as Michael Stephen Seresin. He is known for his work on [Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban](#) (2004), [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014) and [Midnight Express](#) (1978)
- [Principal photography](#) on the film began on October 14, 2015, in the [Lower Mainland](#) in [Vancouver](#), under the working title *Hidden Fortress*
- Filming was expected to take place there until early March 2016
- Parts of the film were expected to shoot for up to five days in the [Kananaskis](#) in late January and early February
- In March, Serkis confirmed that he had finished shooting his portions

EDITING/VFX (William Hoy, Stan Salfas)

- As with [Rise](#) and [Dawn](#), the visual effects for [War](#) were created by [Weta Digital](#); the apes were created with a mixture of motion-capture and CGI key-frame animation, as they were performed in motion-capture technology and animated in CGI
- William Hoy was born in 1955 in the USA. He is known for his work on [300](#) (2006), [Watchmen](#) (2009) and [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014)

- Stan Salfas is known for his work on [Dawn of the Planet of the Apes](#) (2014), [One Tree Hill](#)(2003) and [Now You See Me 2](#) (2016)

SOUND/MUSIC (Michael Giacchino)

- On October 17, 2015, it was confirmed that [Michael Giacchino](#), the composer and writer of the soundtrack for *Dawn*, would return to compose the current film's score
- The soundtrack was digitally released to [iTunes](#) and [Amazon](#) on July 7, 2017, and was released in its physical form by [Sony Masterworks](#) on July 21, 2017
- 75 minutes of score
- Frequently hires the Hollywood Studio Symphony to perform his scores
- Frequently hires [Dan Wallin](#) to record and mix his scores
- Frequently hires [Tim Simonec](#) to orchestrate and conduct his scores
- The music he writes is thematic so that each character in the films he scores are identified by their theme.
- Frequently works with [J.J. Abrams](#) and Pixar
- Often gives his score cues pun titles.

PROMOTION

- The film was initially set for a July 29, 2016, release. However, in January 2015, Fox postponed the film's release date to July 14, 2017
- A special behind-the-scenes footage for the film was aired on TV on November 22, 2015, as part of a contest announcement presented by director [Matt Reeves](#) and [Andy Serkis](#)
 - This announcement allows winners to wear a performance-capture suit and be in a scene as an ape. On the same day, the announcement was later released on 20th Century Fox's official [YouTube](#) page
- At a [New York Comic Con](#) special event on October 6, Reeves, Serkis and producer Dylan Clark debuted an exclusive look of the film
- Serkis also mentioned that the film will be accompanied by a video game, for which he is performing motion capture
- The teaser trailer debuted at New York Comic Con on 6th October 2016

BOX OFFICE

- Total Lifetime Grosses (As of July 30th): \$118,687,629
- Domestic: \$118,687,629
 - + Foreign: \$105,904,839
 - = Worldwide: \$224,592,468
- Domestic Summary
 - Opening Weekend: \$56,262,929
 - (#1 rank, 4,022 theaters, \$13,989 average)
 - % of Total Gross: 47.4%
- > View All Weekends
 - Widest Release: 4,100 theaters
 - In Release: 6 days / 0.9 weeks
- In North America, the film was projected to gross \$50–60 million in its opening weekend, however, given its acclaimed status and strong word-of-mouth, rival studios believed the film had the potential to debut as high as \$70–80 million
- *War* was closely monitored by analysts as the summer was witnessing a decline in ticket sales due to the effect of an overabundance of sequels and reboots, as well as franchise fatigue (such as [Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales](#), [Transformers: The Last Knight](#) and [The Mummy](#)), however box office analysts noted that well-reviewed films have tended to perform in-line with estimates ([Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2](#), [Wonder Woman](#) and [Spider-Man: Homecoming](#))

- It made \$5 million from Thursday night previews at 3,021 theaters, up 22% from the \$4.1 million earned by its predecessor, and \$22.1 million on its first day. It went on to debut to \$56.3 million, topping the box office, albeit a 22% drop from *Dawn's* \$72.6 million debut
- Outside North America, *War for the Planet of the Apes* will receive a scattered release in a span of three months (July–September). The film began its release in about a third of the marketplace on July 14, albeit only in two major markets, and was projected to have an opening of \$50–60 million, with the potential to go higher if the smaller Asian markets over-perform as they have on recent tentpoles
- It ended up having an international debut of just \$44.2 million, including \$9.27 million in the United Kingdom

RECEPTION

- IMDB: 8.0
- Cinemascore: A-
- RT: 93% Tatometer, 86% Audience
- The site's critical consensus reads, "*War for the Planet of the Apes* combines breathtaking special effects and a powerful, poignant narrative to conclude this rebooted trilogy on a powerful – and truly blockbuster – note."
- On review aggregator [Metacritic](#), which assigns a weighted average rating to reviews, the film has a score of 82 out of 100, based on 50 critics, indicating "universal acclaim"
- Audiences polled by [CinemaScore](#) gave the film an average grade of "A–" on an A+ to F scale, the same score earned by its previous two predecessors

SEQUEL/LEGACY

- During an interview with [MTV News](#) in mid-November 2014, Andy Serkis talked about possible sequels: "It might be three films, it could be four. It could be five. Who knows? The journey will continue."
- In October 2016, it was announced that a fourth *Planet of the Apes* film is being planned

DEMETRI NOTES

- As inspiration for the film's panoramic scale and mythic atmosphere, Reeves re-watched many of cinema's most sweeping, action-packed spectacles, from Kurosawa's Samurai epics to Clint Eastwood Westerns -- films with which *War* shares a mix-mastering of conflict and comedy with themes of perseverance, sacrifice, allegiance, wilderness, heroism and questing through moral grey zones in times of dizzying uncertainty. "Part of the thrill of making these films is the opportunity to bring new technology and new forms of cinema to classical myths, creating something unique for these times," Reeves explains
- Taking the part, an especially demanding and complex one for a child actor, is 12 year-old Amiah Miller in her first major feature. Reeves describes how Miller won the role: "Amiah is such an intuitive young actor. When she came in to audition we threw away the script and I just asked her to relate to the apes. It was clear right then that she was special and had a talent way beyond her years. She and the actors became like a family. She has a bright future ahead of her, I can't wait to see what she does."
- Says Matt Reeves: "Bad Ape is a really important character who imparts the largeness of the story. He's very funny – but also through him you realize the virus has spread to many others, and a whole world of intelligent apes is out there, a world that's on a trajectory to the one you see in the original *Planet of the Apes* from 1968. As a character, Bad Ape is one of our favorites."
- "Writing Bad Ape was easily the most fun we've had," adds Mark Bombback. "We often had to stop ourselves from going too far with him because he's such a cool character, he could easily have eaten the entire script. But we thought it important to show there are other apes out there with their own stories."
- UPPING THE PERFORMANCE CAPTURE BAR

- “Actors are starting to understand that when you do performance capture you’re not simply standing in for the character until the magic is done later on. You’re not representing the character; you have to become the character,” he explains. “In my view, there is no difference at all between playing a role in a performance capture suit and a role in costume and makeup. Absolutely none.”
- The filmmakers once again turned to the visual effects artists at the New Zealand-based visual effects house Weta Digital. “Working with Dan Lemmon and the artists at Weta is so inspiring,” says Reeves. “They are constantly raising the bar of what is possible, and the results in this film are absolutely a high water mark in visual effects to date.”
- Weta Digital has continued to evolve their capture technology over the three films to ensure no matter where the story goes, the performance of the actors on set is always recorded so the animators can see the dynamics at play.
- PRODUCER PETER CHERNIN; “When we shot Rise, performance capture had never before been attempted in an open environment outside a soundstage, and we were the first to shoot in the woods,” Peter Chernin recalls. “Now we’re going to mountaintops and into the snow. People don’t know how extraordinary complex it is. Wet fur is one of the hardest things to do digitally and snow on fur is another level on top of that. What’s been fun is that a huge number of special effects people got into their jobs because of the original Planet of the Apes movie, thought it was done with makeup and costumes, because it was so imaginative – and now they are really pushing the state of the art of CG animation to create images such as ape on horseback in the snow, which is extraordinary.”
- Weta’s visual effects supervisor Dan Lemmon, who received Academy Award® nominations for his contributions to both Rise and Dawn, explains that performance capture technology has evolved, much like the apes, since shooting Rise. Limitations are falling by the wayside. Real-time facial animation tools now allow artists to execute complex and precise facial animation decisions in the moment, allowing them to recreate any expression and honor the fidelity of the actor’s performance – and for hundreds of characters in a scene.
- War marks another first for performance capture – the first time it has been used in extreme weather, including falling snow. Lemmon explains the daunting task: “We had to take a process already considered very sensitive and carefully calibrate it into areas with sub-freezing temperatures and snow flurries. It’s exciting, because we’ve opened up the possibility that you can use performance capture anywhere, interacting with any environment and still have full confidence that you’ve captured every nuance an actor is bringing.”
- Meanwhile Ryan Stafford was supervising some 50 visual effects personnel – and overseeing a 10-person witness camera unit, an array of 35 to 45 motion capture cameras, as well as an army of data wranglers, surveyors and photographers gathering information on every detail of each of the sets. The surveying alone was a massive job. “Because we don’t know while shooting what elements might ultimately be created as CG, we have to make sure that every single inch of our sets and locations were surveyed. It takes a huge team to make sure every prop, every set dressing, every pebble on the ground is photographed. We 3-D scanned every inch of the set,” he explains.
- Stafford continues: “Then we had a huge bank of computers we called Mission Control, which had a variety of human operators. They are the ones who hit record on all the motion capture, focus the cameras and make sure all the data we get is clean. It was a monumental effort. We had to shoot every shot twice, sometimes four times, then try to fit all of those complexities into a standard shooting day.”
- One of the most gratifying successes for the performance capture team came in the scene when Maurice first connects with Nova. Stafford says, “Her interaction with the apes is so delicate it brought a host of complexities – from how her hair interacts with Maurice’s fur to her clothing pressing against his belly. All of that was carefully orchestrated to create something convincing and ultimately very moving.”
- APE EFFECTS: ADVANCES IN VFX
- Weta, which also pushed into new territory in several areas of digital effects to craft the film’s array of more than 1,400 highly complex effects shots. The team working under senior VFX

supervisor Joe Letteri and VFX supervisor Dan Lemmon particularly focused on creating highly realistic interactions between the apes and their environments, from their hidden fortress to the Colonel's prison.

- New concepts seen in War include:
- A new organic forest growth software known as Totara: this next-generation simulation tool cleverly emulates nature's own growth patterns, allowing trees to adapt to the plant life surrounding them and even makes changes to shape and color caused by aging over time –new growth is red, then leaves turn green and naturally brown as they decay. Weta considers this tool to be an early look at the exciting direction organic effects tools will take over the next decade.
- Advanced Fur System: the fur technology used in War surpasses all used previously, bringing new levels of complexity to how digital fur behaves and interacts with the world. The particular need to mix fresh snow with fur drove innovation as the VFX team worked through of how snow sticks to fur, clumps on it, falls off and reacts as the apes walk through snowy environments. The fur groomers also got substantially denser: Caesar alone had nearly a million strands of hair.
- Manuka physLight toolset: this newly-built toolset models with pinpoint accuracy how cameras pick up and respond to light. The result is that the War team was able to light the apes similarly to how a DP would light, with all the same photographic rules applying as those used on the soundstage.
- The CG avalanche: Weta put major research into forging the film's spectacular avalanche, including studying the physics of fluid dynamics to accurately recreate clouds of snow rocketing down a mountain.
- APE CAMP WITH TERRY NOTARY
- Before production began, actor and choreographer Terry Notary convened what became affectionately known as Ape Camp, where actors submerge themselves in ape behavior, fine-tuning their movements, rhythms and timing. Veteran cast and newcomers alike had to confront the new reality for the apes – that they are increasingly upright creatures losing their wild form and seeing the world anew.
- Ape Camp begins, unexpectedly, with 20 minutes of sitting. Notary explains that he thinks morphing human actors into intellectually advanced simians requires a meditative process: "It's funny, new actors always ask, 'So what do I do? How do I do it?' But the first thing is, you don't do anything. Instead, we undo everything. That's the key. Through the course of these films, I've found it's not about trying to channel an ape at all. It's about dropping deeply into yourself, softening and widening your perception, while being really open and vulnerable. I've learned by playing Rocket that it's being the most honest me."
- Notary has done extensive research, watching countless videos of gorillas, chimps and orangutans in the wild and captivity. But he's convinced that when it comes to moving like an ape, imitation is not the best approach. "The Great Apes are amazing to watch, and it's a really useful tool – but only so long as you don't try to mimic them. Mimicry doesn't feel real. Instead, you look for fundamentals and then riff on those through your character. It is the subtlety that really brings the gravitas to these characters."
- Andy Serkis found Notary's training invaluable. "Without Terry, apes wouldn't feel so alive," he muses. "He teaches you movement skills but more than that he teaches you how to just be and not feel you have to over-show anything." Steve Zahn adds: "If you pretend you're an ape, it looks horrible. But if you become the ape in your being, in the most simple way really, it's remarkable how quickly you transform."
- For newcomer Michael Adamthwaite, who takes over the vital role of Luca the Silverback Gorilla, Ape Camp was like nothing else he's experienced. "We spent days just working on running. We'd do 360's, through the creek and over the rocks over and over. The instruction was just do it, don't think. Be an ape. It really was a privilege to work with Terry and draw from his boundless energy."
- APE ARCHITECTURE: THE DESIGN
- Director Matt Reeves collaborated with a trusted team to craft a thrillingly naturalistic journey through this fabled world, including:
- cinematographer Michael Seresin,

- production designer James Chinlund
- costume designer Melissa Bruning.
- CINEMATOGRAPHER MICHAEL Seresin shot in native 3D using the brand new Arriflex 65mm digital format.
- PRODUCTION DESIGNER JAMES Chinlund set out on an adventure of his own, erecting some of the most intricate sets he's designed, including the imposingly massive Tower Rock prison, a hidden ape fortress and the entrancingly icebound ski lodge.
- Chinlund notes that this film also presented him with the greatest number of unique sets. "Matt was really excited about developing a road movie feel," he says. "So we had to figure out how to provide as many different looks as we possibly could – from ocean to mountains to the desert -- while building the arc of the apes' journey.
- The quest to create one of the film's biggest, most unsettling sets -- the harrowing Tower Rock prison, a refurbished military installation overseen in ruthless fashion by the Colonel – was an epic adventure of its own. The team devoted a full 5 months to crafting and constructing the set on a lot near the Fraser River in Richmond, just outside Vancouver.
- Andy Serkis. "Walking onto it that first day – with all its immensity and forebodingness – it was dismal as hell. It was just fantastic for the story but it was a bit brutal to work on that set. We were there for about 40 days and it definitely made you feel a bit broken and desperate, as it was intended."
- PRODUCTION DESIGNER JAMES Chinlund concurs that the prison was created to be grim and grimy, but he also worked to make it compelling. "Prison is a tough world in which to find texture and visual excitement," he observes. "But we wanted to deliver something with a really captivating presence. We also designed it to give Michael Seresin and the shooting crew lots of creative options to move the camera and find intriguing angles."
- Contrasting with the bleak prison is the mountain ski lodge that reveals within a dazzling ice palace, which gave the design team the opportunity to create something luminous and magical in the midst of war. The set was painstakingly constructed at Mammoth Studios near Vancouver.
- "The lodge set was incredibly important to Matt," explains Chinlund. "He was very drawn to the idea of seeing them inside a frozen ice palace. I always try to incorporate how the apes move, so I designed the lodge as more of a vertical space. Being able to conceive sets on a vertical as opposed to horizontal plane is such an unusual situation it inspired a lot of creativity. I loved playing with that idea and the idea of them clinging to the edge of this cliff, while this beautiful winter landscape spills away from them."
- DRESSING FOR THE POST-APOCALYPSE: COSTUMES
- For costume designer Melissa Bruning, Dressing the Colonel and his soldiers gave Bruning some fascinating areas to explore,
- COSTUME DESIGNER MELISSA BRUNING: "I was thinking about the idea that any military uniforms seen in the film would have been manufactured in 2012, at the last moment human society was still intact. So the Colonels, Majors and Sergeants are in newer camo versus the privates who wear the pattern being phased out at that point.
- The Colonel is in what they call in the military MultiCam [a 7-color, multi-environment camouflage pattern that was used in the Afghanistan War]
- Preacher is in digicam [a pixelated camouflage pattern that is no longer used]. The average person may not know, but if you're in the military, you know it's accurate."
- A favorite design for MELISSA Bruning in War is Nova. "There was no map of how to do Nova," recalls Bruning. "Matt told me that he felt she was a real ray of hope, so I immediately thought of her as ethereal and a little magical -- this tiny human whose won the heart of apes. Matt loved the idea of evoking a modern fairytale, so we tried to bring a bit of fantasy into this very real, emotional world."
- After poring through research, MELISSA Bruning showed Reeves a cavalcade of female fairytale characters, then created her own modern spin on their shapes. She describes, "Nova has knickers and a skirt reminiscent of the Dust Bowl. She has a hoodie, but it's made with a nubby fabric that looks sort of like an old stuffed animal. Her red boots add that one twist – she is all light

and ethereal, and then you have red boots to ground her. She isn't from any one period, so she has a timeless quality."

- Once principal photography was completed, the epic nature of the production became an equally epic editing process, transforming what had been shot into a taut braid of action, emotion and mythic themes. Editors William Hoy and Stan Salfas, who also edited Dawn, worked closely with Reeves.
- "Matt was looking for the most intimate, emotional moments that make the audience connect to these characters, both human and ape. It was all about the balance," says Dylan Clark. "Matt's editors worked tirelessly to carve out specificity to these characters while always being focused on building tension and surprise."
- One of the film's finishing touches is one of its most potent storytelling tools: Michael Giacchino's score, which veers from the delicate to the lyrical to the colossal, through scenes of sparse dialogue. "The nature of the story meant the score had to really propel the action and emotion so the music was very important," says Chernin. "Michael and Matt have a deep creative relationship and Michael has a remarkable understanding of the apes' world and how to heighten the emotions of this journey."
- For Reeves, the film that resulted is one that, no matter what becomes of humankind or apekind, speaks to the basic ideals of humanity – humanity not in the sense of being human-related but in the sense of seeking the most inspirational qualities of wisdom and benevolence.
- "The wonder of these films is that they give us a chance to explore human nature at its core, but in a way that can be exciting and different," Reeves concludes.
- <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/war-planet-apes-easter-eggs-nod-original-you-miss-ed-1020625>
- <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/war-planet-apes-how-caesar-was-created-andy-serkis-1021026>
- A decade ago, the idea that a motion-capture ape would be bringing audiences to tears in the best-reviewed tentpole of the summer was a rather ridiculous notion. But it starts to sound almost like destiny when you hear the loving way husband and wife screenwriters Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver speak about Caesar, the captivating character they created in 2006.
- In their home, Caesar feels like a real person, and with War for the Planet of the Apes concluding a trilogy-long arc for the ape leader (played by Andy Serkis), the film feels like saying goodbye to a family member (at least for now).
- "Our daughter sees Caesar as a brother," Silver tells Heat Vision. "When we first conceived of him, he felt like our child at the time."
- But perhaps their greatest trick so far has been reviving Planet of the Apes. Initially, Silver and Jaffa didn't conceive of Caesar being as part of the Apes universe.
- "The concept was always Caesar's character, and we didn't set out to reinvent Planet of the Apes," says Jaffa. "We really set out to tell the story of one character. So the character was kind of born in our minds before we made the connection to, 'Oh my god, this could be Planet of the Apes.'"
- When they settled on Planet of the Apes, the deck was stacked against the project. The Apes brand had been damaged from Tim Burton's poorly received 2001 reboot, and their pitch to Fox for the property came with a twist: the apes, not the humans, would be the protagonists. Audience would grow to know and love the apes all through the eyes of Caesar, a chimp raised from infancy by a scientist (James Franco).
- "That was the big risk. We tried very hard to sell it to the studio, because we knew if we focused on Caesar at home, the audience would fall in love with Caesar," Silver says.
- After Serkis came on board as Caesar, he gave a performance that was so good he'd bring members of the crew to tears on set. But there was another hurdle: it was unclear if effects house Weta would be able to come through with believable ape effects for Serkis' incredible mo-cap performance.
- "The first shots of Andy came in, and people in the production office waiting were jumping up and down. Crying and laughing, because we thought, 'Oh my god, this is going to work,'" Jaffa says.

- As for what's next for Apes, Reeves and others involved in the franchise have suggested there could be a spinoff starring a new character called Bad Ape (Steve Zahn), a chimp who also possesses the super intelligence of Caesar's tribe, but comes from another place. Jaffa and Silver hope to be involved in whatever form the franchise takes.
- "There are things set up in the first one that have yet to complete themselves," Jaffa says, noting there's a lot of territory left between War and the journey of Charlton Heston's Col. Taylor has in 1968 original.
- There are a lot of stories that could be told, over thousands of years (the 1968 film takes place 2,000 years in the future). But perhaps the biggest challenge will be crafting a character as singular as Caesar to see them through.
- "Watching Caesar's evolution through these movies has been incredibly gratifying. Watching the things that were set up play out," Silver says. "It's very rare that you get the satisfaction as writers to see a saga follow through."
- <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/war-planet-apes-steve-zahn-joining-franchise-a-s-bad-ape-1019545>
- Matt Reeves' War for the Planet of the Apes, audiences meet a chimpanzee called Bad Ape, played by Steve Zahn, The film marks Zahn's first appearance in the Apes saga as he joined the existing cast, including Andy Serkis, who plays ape leader Caesar, and it was also his first experience with performance capture.
- "I loved Bad Ape's vulnerability. He was in solitude for so long and was yearning for companionship. Within the story, I thought that was so brilliant and would add levity," he says. "Bad Ape's also a Dad and he's alone. And he's dealt with his pain through hoarding."
- As for his introduction to performance capture, Zahn says he learned that acting is no different. "If you had asked me about performance capture before I got to know this process, I would have thought there would be things that would impede the way I usually work," he admits. "But there isn't any."
- Of the larger story of the apes versus the humans, fighting for their civilizations, Zahn says, "This is so relevant to today: The dangers of fear. The lack of empathy. This general lack of not understanding others who are not like you. A changing world — maybe changing a little faster than we think it is."