

# Ape battles, human nature and Japanese art

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Breathless action, big ideas and potent storytelling combine in *War For the Planet of the Apes*; a young woman is encouraged to engage in a ground-breaking experiment that pushes the boundaries of privacy, ethics, and ultimately her personal freedom in the Techno thriller *The Circle*; a successful suburbanite commuter takes a perverse detour from family life and vanishes without a trace in *Wakefield*; *The Odyssey* explores thirty years in the life of captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau (Lambert Wilson), the famous researcher, scientist, inventor, filmmaker; and the documentary *Hokusai: beyond the Great Wave* focuses on the work, life and times of Japan's greatest artist, and printmaker of the Edo (Modern Tokyo) period.

## War For The Planet Of The Apes

Caesar (Andy Serkis) and his apes are forced into a deadly conflict with an army of humans led by a ruthless colonel (Woody Harrelson). This third and climactic chapter of the critically acclaimed blockbuster trilogy, director Matt Reeves and an all-star cast unleash the rapidly evolving simians into a world boiling over with divisions and rage as the ape vs. human battle for control of the world careens towards the ultimate winner-takes-all decision.

In a flurry of mythic filmmaking, audiences will witness the pivotal moment that determines the fate of human civilisation forever –and be immersed in the ape leader Caesar's emotional quest to lead his young society to a new home, even as a war between his belief in family and honor versus the lure of a vengeful reckoning churns within his soul. At heart, this is the story of both a military and emotional last stand. As peace between species has collapsed -- and a renegade band of human soldiers led by an imperious Colonel makes a final, all-out attack -- Caesar is hit with an unimaginable personal loss and a dark line inside his psyche is crossed. Now, he is wrestling with merciless impulses and roiling doubts about his own ability to inspire the apes towards freedom. But if the apes are to survive the coming conflict, Caesar must lead. In a time when empathy and compassion have nearly vanished both in the world and his heart, Caesar searches for the grit, sense of fellowship and striving vision to lead the apes towards a future of hope.

“We put Caesar to the ultimate test in this film,” says Mark Bomback, who co-wrote the screenplay with Reeves.

“Unfortunately for Caesar, that test is a harrowing one. The apes are in trouble and he understands they are going to have to really earn their spot as the dominant species on the planet.”

Reeves adds: “Caesar is tested in ways we found thrilling and epic, which really opens the movie up. The scale of this movie is huge. As the apes leave Muir Woods, they encounter a larger world.”

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,” explains Reeves.

After the apes suffer unimaginable losses, Caesar wrestles with his darker instincts and begins his own mythic quest to avenge his kind. As the journey finally brings them face to face, Caesar and the colonel are pitted against each other in an epic battle that will determine the fate of both of their species and the future of the planet. It is directed by Matt Reeves and written by Mark Bomback, and Reeves. It is a sequel to the 2014 film *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and the third installment in the *Planet of the Apes* reboot series.

## The Odyssey

*The Odyssey* explores thirty years in the life of captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau (Lambert Wilson), the famous researcher, scientist, inventor, filmmaker whose greatest achievement is to have made the general public more curious, and accordingly closer, to the sea. A genius, a leader of men and a charismatic opinion maker, Cousteau was not without defects, his being unfaithful to ever-supportive wife Simone for example or else his vain glory... but, let him who is without sin cast the first stone. The spectator leaves Cousteau in mid-1979 at the worst time of his life: his favourite son, Philippe, has just died in the crash of a plane he was piloting. The dashing conqueror of the sea has suddenly become a broken old man, tempted to discouragement, but his eldest son Jean-Michel is by his side to help him overcome his grief and go on with his mission. This French-Belgian biographical adventure was directed by Jérôme Salle and written by Salle and Laurent Turner.

## The Circle

In this techno-thriller Mae (Emma Watson) is hired to work for The Circle, the world's largest and most powerful tech and social media company, she sees it as the opportunity of a lifetime. As she rises through the ranks, she is encouraged by the company's charismatic founder, Eamon Bailey (Tom Hanks), to engage in a groundbreaking experiment that pushes the boundaries of privacy, ethics, and ultimately her personal freedom. Her participation in the experiment, and her every decision begin to affect the lives and future of her friends, family and that of humanity. The film is directed by James Ponsoldt (*Master of None*, *The End of the Tour*, *The Spectacular Now*) with a screenplay by James Ponsoldt and Dave Eggers, based on Eggers' novel.

The core question of the film is: How does the world balance the benefits of a transparent society versus the human need for privacy?

This question was Ponsoldt's primary focus as he adapted the book into a film: "When I read Dave's book I loved it and I was terrified of it. It's definitely a thriller, but there is an element of horror about it too. And mainly, and I think this will resonate with the audience as well, is because we see ourselves in the main character. I realized that Mae's addictions are my addictions, to all my gadgets. I like my right to privacy, I value it very much. I don't want to cede my privacy and I like that I can make a conscious choice about what I will share with the world. But there's a trade that we make."

## Wakefield

Wakefield is writer-director Robin Swicord's adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's short story, successful suburbanite commuter Howard Wakefield (Bryan Cranston) takes a perverse detour from family life: He vanishes without a trace. Hidden in the attic of his carriage house garage, surviving by scavenging at night, Howard secretly observes the lives of his wife (Jennifer Garner) and children and neighbors. Wakefield becomes a fraught meditation on marriage and identity, as Howard slowly realises that he has not in fact left his family, he has left himself. Watch the trailer.

"I wanted to make a film that fairly closely followed Doctorow's story, yet would allow me to explore my own questions about Howard Wakefield. I was teasing out thematic threads that intrigued me, about marriage and identity. Doctorow pointed me to the source that had inspired him: Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Wakefield," set in London, in which a man disappears from his own settled life, with no explanation; then lingers in a boarding house across the street to watch what happens. In the story, Hawthorne extends a casual invitation: "If the reader chooses, let him do his own meditation; or if he prefers to ramble with me... I bid him welcome."

A hundred and seventy years later, E. L. Doctorow took him up on the offer, and wrote his version of "Wakefield" with a free hand. "I'll always be grateful to Doctorow for his same generosity of spirit, when he urged me to approach the film as my own "meditation," and not fear that he'd take offense to anything I invented. He also offered his story rights gratis, deferring compensation until we were headed to production. To me, Edgar's extraordinary generosity helped set the DNA of our little enterprise, or at least it seems that way now," said Swicord.

## **Hokusai: beyond the Great Wave**

British Museum presents *Hokusai*, a documentary and exclusive private view of the British Museum exhibition, Hokusai: beyond the Great Wave. The documentary will be screened at Ster-Kinekor Cinema Nouveau sites nationwide, the art cinema that promises a unique and inspiring cinema experience for film lovers with an appreciation of the beauty and artistry of film. Filmed in Japan, the US and the UK, *Hokusai* focuses on the work, life and times of Katsushika Hokusai, painter and printmaker of the Edo (Modern Tokyo) period. Hokusai is regarded Japan's greatest artist, who influenced Monet, Van Gogh and other impressionists.

The film uses spectacular close-ups and expert insights to show his wide-ranging influence and legacy. Using pioneering 8K Ultra HD video technology, Hokusai's paintings and prints are examined by world experts who are at the forefront of digital art history. The famous volcano Mount Fuji, which was a model for Hokusai in his quest for immortality during his later years, appears in the background of his most famous painting, 'The Great Wave', an image depicting an enormous wave threatening boats off the coast. Known as the father of manga, he vividly brought to life demonic mythological beings, erotica and fantasy. Interestingly, he is the only painter with his own emoji. Through much tragedy, and poverty, he never stopped striving for perfection in his work. The documentary is introduced by arts presenter Andrew Graham-Dixon, and features artists David Hockney, Grayson Perry and Maggi Hambling, along with leading scholars of the day. He was a master, and as Hockney put it, "He was a prodigy, like Picasso."

*Hokusai* releases on Saturday, 15 July 2017, for four screenings on 15, 19 and 20 July at 7:30pm and on 16 July at 2:30pm at Ster-Kinekor's Nouveau cinemas in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town, and at Ster-Kinekor Gateway in Durban. The running time is approximately 90 minutes, including an interval. For booking information on *Hokusai* visit [www.sterkinekor.com](http://www.sterkinekor.com) / Watch the trailer

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## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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