

Monday Magazine

British Columbia

Film

By Robert Moyes

With her slender frame, serene intelligence, and cultivated manners, Jane Goodall seems, at first glance, to be president of a Jane Austen book club or perhaps a gifted pruner of antique roses. Look again and you might glimpse the steel in her spine. Forty years ago this English-born woman flew to Africa because renowned paleo-anthropologist Louis Leakey chose her to study a colony of chimpanzees. Goodall quietly but determinedly broke the "rules" by which (male) scientists studied our primate cousins: as she gradually won the confidence of the chimps she began to interact with them. She also gave them names instead of numbers, and what she eventually learned about the creatures with which we share nearly 99 percent of our "human" DNA created a scientific revolution. Equally revolutionary was the worldwide awareness that she created about the plight of chimpanzees and apes, alerting people to how their natural habitat was being increasingly destroyed at the same time as logging roads were unexpectedly giving poachers unprecedented access to these remarkable creatures.

That inspirational story is the subject of Jane Goodall's *Wild Chimpanzees*, a new IMAX film that was in production for more than five years. Although there is some archival footage in black and white, *Wild Chimpanzees* is mostly set in the present day, at Gombe Research Station on Lake Tanganyika, now vastly expanded from the simple tent that sheltered Goodall in the early '60s. In true IMAX fashion there are swooping camera shots of the undulating green

Going Ape

Playing nicely with other species

African landscapes, while Johnny Clegg provides a tasty Afro-pop soundscape. In keeping with the educational aesthetic of IMAX, there is lots of intriguing information about tool-making, language, and how chimp behaviour is often "culturally distinct" from one colony to the next. And of course there are the inevitable money shots: cute close-ups of chimps doing social grooming, and much gymnastic larking-about as they conduct the monkey business for which they are justly renowned.

Although the chimps' antics are mostly comic, the mood briefly changes from Marx Brothers to *The Sopranos* when Goodall recalls how, long ago, she was horrified to watch a larger tribe of chimps slaughter a splinter group at the periphery of their territory. This ruthlessly hierarchical struggle for power re-emerged most recently when a big chimp named Frodo murdered his own brother to become the undisputed alpha male of Goodall's colony. Although she no longer believes that chimps are a kinder, gentler version of humans, Goodall still loves them utterly—but after having suffered a couple of attacks, is leery of the aggressive males that she matter-of-factly characterizes as "thugs."

Full of wisdom, reverence, comedy, and a bit of messaging about Goodall's current project to create sanctuaries that nurture chimps orphaned by the poaching trade, *Chimpanzees* is a delightful, family-friendly viewing experience.

Rating: ****

(Jane Goodall's *Wild Chimpanzees* continues at the IMAX)