

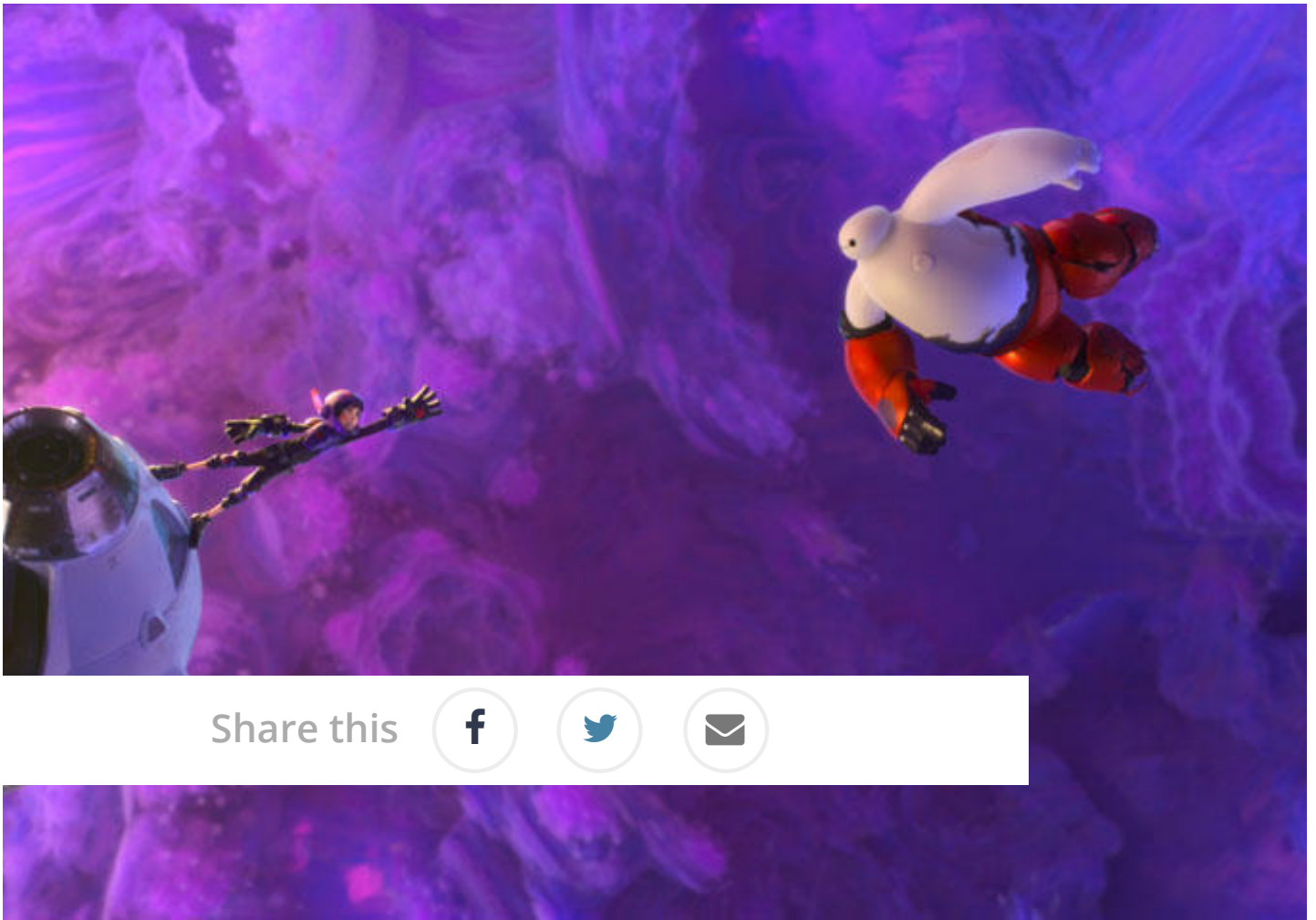
Dawn of the Planet of the Apes and Big Hero 6 Dominate Visual Effects Society Awards; JJ Abrams Talks 'Star Wars'

By **Bill Desowitz** | Thompson on Hollywood

February 5, 2015 at 9:48AM

The top VFX prize for "Dawn of the Planet of the Apes" and a "Big Hero 6" sweep provide Oscar boosts at 13th annual Visual Effects Society confab.





"Dawn of the Planet of the Apes" took three of the top VES honors for Weta Digital Wednesday at the Beverly Hilton (including the key visual effects prize, animated character Caesar and live-action compositing). This presumably gives "Apes" a leg up on rival "Interstellar," which earned a single award for the stunning [Tesseract](#) created environment.

However, Disney made VES history with "Big Hero 6" grabbing a record five awards in its surprising animation sweep (including animated feature, the San Fransokyo model, created environment for "[Into the Portal](#)," the animated Baymax character and effects simulation). After its disappointing showing Saturday night at the Annies, Disney upstaged DreamWorks' "How to Train Your Dragon 2" in the Oscar race for animated feature.

Additionally, "X-Men: Days of Future Past" scored two awards for its spectacular Pentagon Kitchen scene (effects simulations courtesy of Rising Sun Pictures and virtual cinematography headed up by The Third Floor); "Birdman" took home best supporting VFX honors and "Game of Thrones" ruled broadcast VFX with three prizes (both from Rodeo FX).



Meanwhile, **J.J. Abrams** ("Star Wars: The Force Awakens") humbly accepted the Visionary Award, thanking, among others, VFX guru Doug Trumbull, who gave him an autograph and note when he was a youngster about having fun making movies. That's been Abrams' motto ever since. Backstage he told me that "Episode VII" will be a more balanced hybrid of CG and practical than his two "Star Trek" movies.

"It's been amazing how much we were able to do in-camera," Abrams said. "Obviously, it's 'Star Wars.' There are an enormous amount of visual effects that are done in CG. But what's really been gratifying is using CG to remove things and to build sets. I remember as a kid seeing [legendary matte painter] Albert Whitlock's work and realizing, among many gifts, that he had this amazing ability to understand where you should focus. And if you look at his paintings, it's amazing how loose the brush strokes get where you're not looking, and he would imply detail but not really paint it.

"And what it speaks to for me is knowing where the audience is looking is like a magic trick. So at a certain point, extending a set or adding things to the background is not really where you're focused and, of course, it takes a brilliant artist to do any of that well. But what's great is when you're able to build a significant amount and focus. So we were able to build quite a lot for this movie and it makes the image, the scene, more effective because it's real."

Abrams added that he enjoyed shooting on film and some of it in IMAX. "This movie has been about looking

forward and acknowledging what's come before, because the characters in the story have what we know as 'Star Wars' as their history. And many of the crew have family members who have worked on the previous trilogy. There's no question that the movie has a big heart and that for me was a part of 'Star Wars.'"

Here are the VES winners:

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Visual Effects-Driven Photoreal/Live Action Feature Motion Picture

"Dawn of the Planet of the Apes"

Joe Letteri

Ryan Stafford

Matt Kutcher

Dan Lemmon

Hannah Bianchini

Outstanding Supporting Visual Effects in a Photoreal/Live Action Feature Motion Picture

"Birdman"

Ara Khanikian

Ivy Agregan

Jake Braver

Isabelle Langlois

Outstanding Animation in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

"Big Hero 6"

Don Hall

Chris Williams

Roy Conli

Zach Parrish

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Visual Effects-Driven Photoreal/Live Action Broadcast Program

"Game of Thrones"; "The Children"

Joe Bauer

Steve Kullback

Stuart Brisdon

Thomas Schelesny

Sven Martin

Outstanding Supporting Visual Effects in a Visual Effects-Driven Photoreal/Live Action Broadcast Program

"American Horror Story"; "Freak Show"; "Edward Mordrake, Part 2"

Jason Piccioni

Jason Spratt

Mike Kirylo

Justin Ball

Eric Roberts

Outstanding Real-Time Visuals in a Video Game

"Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare"

Yi-chao Sandy Lin-Chiang

Joseph Salud

Demetrius Leal

Dave Blizzard

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Commercial

"SSE"; Maya

Neil Davies

Alex Hammond

Jorge Montiel

Beth Vander

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Special Venue Project

"Ratatouille: L'Aventure Totalement Toquee de Remy"

Tony Apodaca

Marianne McLean

Gilles Martin

Edwin Chang

Mark Mine

Outstanding Performance of an Animated Character in a Photoreal/Live Action Feature Motion Picture

"Dawn of the Planet of the Apes"; Caesar

Paul Story

Eteuati Tema

Andrea Merlo

Emiliano Padovani

Outstanding Performance of an Animated Character in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

"Big Hero 6"; Baymax

Colin Eckart

John Kahwaty

Zach Parrish

Zack Petroc

Outstanding Performance of an Animated Character in a Commercial, Broadcast Program, or Video Game

"SSE"; Maya

Jorge Montiel

Alex Hammond

Daniel Kmet

Philippe Moine

Outstanding Created Environment in a Photoreal/Live Action Feature Motion Picture

"Interstellar"; Tesseract

Tom Bracht

Graham Page

Thomas Døhlen

Kirsty Clark

Outstanding Created Environment in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

"Big Hero 6"; Into the Portal

Ralf Habel

David Hutchins

Michael Kaschalk

Olun Riley

Outstanding Created Environment in a Commercial, Broadcast Program, or Video Game

"Game of Thrones"; Braavos Establisher

Rene Borst

Christian Zilliken

Jan Burda

Steffen Metzner

Outstanding Virtual Cinematography in a Photoreal/Live Action Motion Media Project

"X-Men: Days of Future Past"; Kitchen Scene

Austin Bonang

Casey Schatz

Dennis Jones

Newton Thomas Sigel

Outstanding Models in any Motion Media Project

"Big Hero 6"; City of San Fransokyo

Brett Achorn

Minh Duong

Scott Watanabe

Larry Wu

Outstanding Effects Simulations in a Photoreal/Live Action Feature Motion Picture

"X-Men: Days of Future Past"; Quicksilver Pentagon Kitchen

Adam Paschke

Premamurti Paetsch

Sam Hancock

Timmy Lundin

Outstanding Effects Simulations in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

"Big Hero 6"

Henrik Falt

David Hutchins

Michael Kaschalk

John Kosnik

Outstanding Effects Simulations in a Commercial, Broadcast Program, or Video Game

"Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey"

Dominique Vidal

Isabelle Perin-Leduc

Sandrine Lurde

Alexandre Lerouge

Outstanding Compositing in a Photoreal/Live Action Feature Motion Picture

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes

Christoph Salzmann

Florian Schroeder

Quentin Hema

Simone Riginelli

Outstanding Compositing in a Photoreal/Live Action Broadcast Program

"Game of Thrones"; "The Watchers on the Wall"

Dan Breckwoldt

Martin Furman

Sophie Marfleet

Eric Andrusyszyn

Outstanding Compositing in a in a Photoreal/Live Action Commercial

"SSE"

Neil Davies

Leonardo Costa

Gianluca DiMarco

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Student Project

"Wrapped"

Roman Kaelin

Falko Paeper

Florian Wittmann