

Documentarian James Reed on Witnessing Chimpanzee Patrols and Attacks

The Joe Rogan experience Now when the chimps are on patrol that's a uniquely intense and aggressive moment and it's so wild to watch to see them These hulking chimpanzees move through the forest in co ordination when you're there with that and you're very close to these violent encounters with the other chimps Is there any concern there that you could get caught up in this sort of violent frenzy and maybe be in danger of being attacked or you know the there there isn't actually And that that I mean the the what Let let me let me rephrase that I would say on a personal level Of course Right You know you come you hear about these things happening you know it's a possibility we'll be there when it happens when it's filmed So we ask exactly the same question So this is you know I've been through the exact same process as you are now and have this conversation with the scientists like are we gonna be safe You know is it safe for us to where should we be or where should we not be if this happens when we're there So totally we had exactly the same questions and we just didn't know and we were reassured by the scientists you know you'll you'll be amazed like you see those things they will happen but they will ignore you And their only warning was that definitely don't get too close You know the because the level of excitement um around the chimps during these encounters you know if there's ever a time when they could accidentally come very close to you or suddenly see you and get a bit of a fright you know that they wouldn't want they wouldn't want to take that sort of a a risk with us So they did they did we were warned you know keep a respectful distance from that But amazingly and there's a little um a little behind the scenes clip that we've sort of released on youtube now and you can see that during during the the biggest encounter that we filmed um the the camera people were sort of like in it and and around it and sort of at one stage sort of like accidentally between the two groups They were sort of standing off and you know that the certain way I mean the chimps move so fast and they organize reorganize separate or whatever So you can try and be in the perfect position But then that perfect position could quickly become where you don't want to be because of where the chimps have gone So through no fault of their own Um you know there there are times when they're sort of they're in there sort of it's a bit like being a war reporter or something Um but weirdly you know they're so focused on what

it is they're doing and have no interest in sort of in involving or redirecting their aggression to the to the humans at all Well I think you know because of you know there are some quite high profile and sort of like pretty tragic sort of human chimp interactions Aren't there a go No no I mean sort of like things that happened at at zoos or or whatever And I think that it I think it does give us sort of an an an unusual impression of what gyms are like in in the wild They they have all that sort of capability and more so you know the Ingogo gyms there's so many of them and and they are engaged in these sort of violent competitions with with other groups That's a very real thing and and and you know and it can get serious but their relationship with people is just completely different to a relationship Chimps might have with people in captivity or if they've been kept as pets or something Um yeah it's just it's not I I totally get it and those are exactly the sort of things I wanted to know before I stepped in and go go Well I mean you know you need to know Um but amazingly when you've been there around it and even once you've just been on a single patrol with the match and they are exhilarating when you go on patrol with yoga chimps It's it's amazing They are taking you on a journey to the edge of their border and they're fully committed and they're coordinated and and they don't seem to care that you're following and they are allowing you to sort of be there That's amazing Yeah it's it's an incredible experience That's real adrenaline Yeah There they are Look at that This was my favorite part Just watching them move coordinations and just wondering like what how do they know like what are they doing It almost seems like they're gesturing in some ways like that Chimp with the one hand So this is the behind the scenes Yeah exactly You know gestures quite often the in our in our form or hands all over each other there That that's undeniable the reassuring gestures They they know they're they they're in this like tense situation They're nervous I think that you can read into that that they're sort of telling each other that like I'm with you I'm with you I'm here That physical contact is just you know it's just reassuring each other that we're in this together Um it's you and me and when violence does break out what is that experience Like I mean when you're seeing Chimp on chimp violence from several feet away That has to be wild I don't I say we I mean I don't really want to give away any spoilers for the series because some of some of these things are sort of like major plot points in the series I know what you're saying and I appreciate your artistic It's so good It's so good that even if you say what happens and people get to see it it's so bad I mean and I would say that like like I said I often personally I wasn't there for many of the things

that happened Uh but it was some and I and I have been there previously in go go where certain things have happened And it's hard I I think that is chimp on chimp violence is is a lot harder um to watch um than the chimp on monkey violence for me personally And whether I'm there myself or whether I'm seeing it recorded later on I think there's a there's kind of a sadness to that personally Um quite often It's because in truth the it gets more serious if the chimps outnumber them significantly So when when chimps are kind of equal sized groups when they come into contact they're usually less violent situations there's too much danger there's too much danger too much at stake It's kind of a bit bravado They run at each other a few times But if there's enough chimps on either side you can pretty much know that in this immediate situation no one's gonna get badly hurt Uh they get badly hit when they're outnumbered And obviously that on a human level you just no one likes seeing that sort of thing You know there's there's just a yeah that it's just horrible and it you know unfortunately we've all seen that personally or clips of that in humans and it's the most uncomfortable horrible stuff and it really makes you horrible Um so yeah all of that stuff is very hard to watch Well then I'll say even you know interestingly I say we the scientists and go go we we know them really well now and we've worked with them for a long time So you know we share things and they share stories that on a more personal level with us Um but they are obviously better then we or of you would be detaching themselves you know that this is just what happens They're there to observe and try and understand it's not an emotional thing but even even they who have been there for many years and I think particularly because they've been there for many years Sometimes you see an act of violence on a on a chimp that you've known and been following around for ages They may not care about you but you really care about them and and it's sad Yeah it's very sad during the filming or or at least on the show there's one instance of the chimpanzees killing uh another chimp Was there more of that You're playing the list of these I'm not you think it's a spoiler alert But I'm telling you it's so fascinating and so good I don't no no no it's fine It's doesn't really matter It doesn't matter It's so good It doesn't matter Ok Yes Ok So that happens Was it only one time while you were there Wow Yes No The well there's another thing in the series we're not going to talk about like because that really is a spoiler But um yes couple of occasions whilst we were there and that is how I mean does it does it is it conflicted Do you almost have this like feeling that you want to intervene and protect the chimp or I think yeah everybody who's been around those

feelings you you wish it wouldn't happen You you don't want this to conclude in the way that you think it might Um but again I think I I totally understand what why you're asking But I think once once you've been around them enough and you and you have to have this commitment to and it's part it's part of the same point that you were asking earlier about that impact on their lives You want zero impact on their lives or or minimal right You don't want any negative impact You actually can't make too much of a positive impact either You know Also it just wouldn't be practical It's not it's not safe you know You know what could you do Shout and make a noise and try and disturb them just enough for a moment that the the gym could get away and you know possibly But I think that it wouldn't be you know it wouldn't be ethical to do it These are it is natural behavior I mean that's my take on it from what I've seen uh and go go that these this is part of their natural behavior They are competitive and they're territorial and those you know those behaviors have served them well in in the past So you can't as much as it's not from a human observer point of view that same thing taking that same situation out there something you observed in the street all those natural sort of tend desires to intervene and stop something you know they're there for good reason Um but you know this is the the entire sort of the entire scientific project our commitment as filmmakers to observe but not interfere I mean that's that's all part of the same thing You couldn't if you stepped out of that role in any circumstance you've kind of you've you've crossed the line in a in a really odd way Um but so so and in a way that sort of helps with the what you're feeling when you see or observe those things because Well you know there's absolutely nothing you can do about this I mean of course ethically you really can intervene but it's still sort of I mean what an amazing experience for you as a human being to have gone through this It's just such a rare rare insight into these animals and these incredibly unique creatures and their behavior It's just you must feel so fortunate just to have to experience just as a human being just as a life experience to take that in Uh I really do I really do I mean this you know I've been very lucky in lots of bits of my job that I've done over the years I think that you know it's a great job It's very hard work a lot harder than probably what people appreciate And um but extremely lucky on on loads of things I do feel with Ingogo Chimps in particular like you say as a human being from an existential sort of point of view There's like so I'm so fortunate and not really not many people get to see that And they are our closest relatives and they are fascinating because of the connections we have with them They're also fascinating because they're

different and they're all individuals and and it's a chance to just you kind of feel a part of something that has you know brought that important knowledge and information um to people Yeah So I I feel personally very fortunate Yeah