

## **‘Beast’ doesn’t offer any new twists; characters, visual effects make it worthwhile**

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun  
Friday, 26 August 2022 04:50

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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 93 minutes

**This film from Universal Pictures will open exclusively in theaters on Aug. 19.**

Movie critics like myself see an awful lot of titles. So many, that after a time one begins to see repetitive patterns and tropes that can become more grating to a reviewer than to an average viewer who isn't nearly as obsessive about such matters.

“Beast” is a horror film about a group of characters who are stranded in the wild and pursued by a seemingly unstoppable creature. The story doesn't offer a lot of new twists or surprises. However, a strong and committed cast, visual flair and decent CGI-effects make enough of a difference to elevate the end product. It is no cinematic classic, but the hard work results in a fun B-movie proving that having familiar plot elements doesn't necessarily guarantee failure.

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Dr. Nate Samuels (Idris Elba) is a widowed M.D. trying to reconnect with his teenage daughters Meredith (Iyana Halley) and Norah (Leah Jeffries). The trio set out on a trip to South Africa to visit the area where Samuels first met his wife and their mother. An old friend and wildlife biologist Martin Battles (Sharlto Copley) picks them up and agrees to house the family during their stay.

When Battles takes them on a safari through a remote part of a game reserve where he works, they suddenly come under siege by a ferocious lion. Trapped, the group do all they can to survive not only the onslaught, but poachers as well.

It’s a very simple survivalist story with the central characters out of their element and in danger from outside forces for the majority of the running time. Of course, Samuels does have to deal with estrangement issues with his prickly children, which are heightened and brought to a head by the deadly situation.

We’ve seen this type of scenario in numerous films, but the cast does an excellent job of making the characters relatable and their motivations understandable. Elba is a very likable lead and his exchanges with co-star Copley are more naturalistic than other films of this ilk, adding some believability to the proceedings early on.

Still, this is a horror film, meaning that the leads do have to put themselves in harm’s way (sometimes unnecessarily so). Thankfully, the time spent developing each one earlier does result in more viewer sympathy, allowing the viewer to forgive a few unusual calls. Samuels is a doctor who wants to help the wounded and these choices often place him in grave danger, but at least the story has provided some motivation for running into danger. The heightened fear on the part of the teens leads to some rash acts, but it also results in a great pay-off during one fracas involving a tranquilizer dart.

One of the movie’s biggest highlights is the striking photography and camerawork. Director/producer Baltasar Kormákur (“Adrift,” “Everest”) uses long takes during the majority of action sequences. The camera hovers around the characters, panning left and right and catching up with them as they try to figure out what to do next while a vicious lion hides in the back of the frame.

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The technique does work, allowing the viewer to scan the scenery and wait for the sudden appearance of the animal, adding significant tension to an otherwise standard jump scare scene. These shots are cleverly staged and work quite well. And the CGI lion also looks decent. While it doesn’t look photorealistic in every shot, the effects are compelling enough to suspend disbelief through many moments.

Admittedly, the titular lion eventually begins to seem like an unstoppable monster instead of a living animal and predator. The story is predictable and viewers will have to forgive a lot of reckless and unsafe behavior on display. Still, the characters are more affable than those found in typical horror tales. The pacing is quick and the attack scenes are not only uniquely shot, but genuinely pulse-pounding.

As such, the film ends up being a surprisingly entertaining little thriller. In fact, this movie would make a fantastic double bill alongside the 2019 alligator film “Crawl,” which feels very similar in tone, execution and a sense of overall enjoyment. In the end, “Beast” doesn’t cut very deep, but it does provide enough thrills and chills to earn it a recommendation.

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