

In The King of The Jungle's Court

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Roar (1981) is a film delivering a plot that surrounds three different groups of individuals and their adaptations to the research and natural observation of a massive horde of wildcats both native and foreign to the region. Each group has a very different experience and mindset with the animals and as such lead to very different lessons. The overall lesson though, is that in order to learn about animals humans must respect their power and learn to coincide with, not dominate their species. In the introduction credits, we see a dedication from the creative staff stating, "Since the choice was made to use untrained animals and since for the most part they chose to do as they wished, it's only fair they share the writing and directing credits".

The creative style used in *Roar* is entirely unique, as this is the only film with no animal trainers, no trained animals, and no expert zoologists on deck. Whatever actions or behaviors the animals exhibit on screen, the actors were instructed to adapt to the scene and keep acting no matter how dangerous. The philosophy of the film is that in order to truly capture the majesty of these creatures, there must be no influence on the behaviors of the animals, it is the actors' responsibility to aid in the delivery of this idea and entertain the audience, not the animals.

As the film opens, we see medium shots of the main character, Hank (a doctor and researcher) aiding local African tribes with their illnesses and injuries. We then follow him with moving wide shots on his motorcycle as he crosses the Savannah alongside wildebeests, giraffes, and cranes all going about their day in their natural habitats. He is ecstatic and overjoyed to be experiencing what he sees nearly every day. He races to a property that is home to one hundred

fifty wildcats. Panthers, mountain lions, tigers, cheetahs, and, most importantly, a ton of lions. A close up of him bottle feeding new cubs of each species, some even newly discovered hybrids. Hank then reconvenes with his partner Mativo to discuss the arrival of Hank's wife and children to the reserve.

This leads to the camera following the two with a wide shot as they move through the property with the animals roaming about. Mativo gives a very reasonable remark about the fact that they are not being attacked by the cats. Hank responds by noting that the animals are not innately violent. Much like humans, they feel emotions and want to express them, but the way they express them is unique to their species. As they move through the horde, the audience sees Hank petting and embracing each creature while not treating them as if they were people. This is just one example of how close humans can be to such a powerful animal, while also respecting the danger that can come with the proximity.

In the very next scene, a gathering of male lions begins to break out as a massive challenge as to which one should be the alpha. A new lion, Togar, has entered the pride and is trying to assert his dominance over it. The current alpha, Robbie, is now constantly attacked by all the males now since it is his authority being challenged. There are several quick shots of the lions scratching, roaring, pouncing, and tearing at each other, only for the violence to quell moments later.

During the fight, Hank attempts to intervene and break the lions up, however he is seen as another challenger and one male succeeds in scaring him off. When all is said and done, Hank is only mildly injured, but the lions have all taken some heavy hits. The lions barely took notice of Hank as he attempted to break up the fight. Once the fight ended, Hank went to treat Robbie's wounds since he wants Robbie to stay as the alpha of the pride. Robbie easily accepted Hank's

aid and never once sees him as a threat to his wellbeing throughout the film. The music of the scene intensified during the battle, but as Hank and Robbie peacefully sit the music is calm and welcoming as this relationship reflects.

After the fight for leadership ended, Hank realizes he has to go pick up his family from the airport and slowly introduce them to the life he has built in Africa, as this way of life seem bizarre and farfetched to any standard person. Unfortunately, Hanks's family arrives at the house, with no cats to be seen initially, meanwhile Hank has already left for the airport. Hank's wife, daughter, and two sons begin to explore the house and note that the land is beautiful. Wide panoramic shots of the environment and the house are shown to the audience as they explore, every so often a low level, high angle shot reveals there to be some cats sneaking around the rafters, leaving the stranger humans entirely alone.

The family begins to break all the rules that Hank listed out for Mativo earlier on in the film. You cannot run or else the cats will think you are either playing or are prey; do not leave the windows or doors open or else the cats will come flooding in, do not make any sudden or loud noises or else the cats will be startled and act out. The family members run around the house, opening all the windows, laughing, and yelling the entire time, and as a result more and more cats begin to fill the house.

The scene is filmed to be comedic as the characters' dialogue encourages them to be relayed as oblivious to all of their surroundings and is supported by several over the shoulder / behind the back shots of the cats just meandering in the background watching the family. All of the family members express their concerns which foreshadow a chain of events that will soon take place. These include threats to Hank's work, the nature of Hank's work, the remoteness of

the reservation, the length of time the family intends on staying, and how important it is for Hank to arrive as they are strangers to this place.

As the scene develops, more and more wildcats begin to enter the house. The family reacts very naturally, they become terrified then begin to scream and hide within cabinets, fridges, and lockers. Each member of the family thinks the lions are out to get them and eat them alive, but the animals are mostly negligent of the new humans. As humans, we have social constructs that lead us to certain actions and understanding the context for certain actions, unfortunately lions do not have this trait. As they enter the house doors are broken down, cushions and pillows are torn apart, decorations are gnawed on and knocked over, food is stolen and eaten, and the house is made a mess within just mere minutes of the lions coming inside. The family interprets these actions as threatening and hostile, but this is far from the truth.

This entire scene encapsulates the message the director wants to get across to the audience. As previously mentioned, the lions were given no directions and were never told how to behave. The behaviors they exhibit while they are within the house are the same behaviors they would exhibit if they were outside of it as if humans were never there in the first place. Although it comes off as the cats are being violent and destructive they are just being playful and curious with these new people that have entered their land as well as this building that they have never gotten the opportunity to explore before.

We see close-up head level shots of the family, terrified within their compartments, but the cats are happily exploring this new territory as any standard animal would. Since the family poses no threat and are only concerned with letting the lions do as they please, the cats welcome these humans and attempt to bring no harm to them whatsoever and any harm that is done is done

completely unintentionally. A scratch can be from an attempt to ask for pats, a bruise from recklessly charging into them to smell them.

As a parallel to the family being stranded with the lions, Hank and Mativo are attempting to get back from the airport after finding out Hank's family had already headed to his reserve. The whole time the two have been accompanied by two tigers. After several inconveniences, Hank acquires a car and loads up the tigers. He requests Mativo gets in his car, but like a standard person, refuses to enter a car with two massive tigers tearing at the leather in the back seat. Mativo points out the destructive nature of the animals, while Hank calmly responds that they do not understand that they are destroying something of value to them. Mativo reluctantly grabs onto the back of the car and rides it instead of getting into the passenger seat.

Already we have seen two entirely different mindsets towards the animals as well as two different interactions as a cause of those mindsets. With the family, they posed no threats to the cats so they were left alone, but they still felt fear as they did not understand just how the cats behaved. Mativo shows a very similar fear and the cats usually attempt to play with him as he comes off as standoffish which invites the cats to play aggressively with him. Hank is the complete opposite. He shows only respect to the cats, no fear no judgement. As such, the cats leave him alone as well.

From what we have seen, as long as there is no immediate threat to the cats then they will not respond with intentional violence. Hank knows and recognizes this so he knows he and Mativo are not in danger, this includes his family's wellbeing if they would be properly introduced to the cats. Although the cats are very capable of fatal wounds and deadly actions, from what has been shown they only harm each other for reasons natural to their species. If they hurt a person it is either accidental or because they feel that their lives are being threatened for one

reason or another. With this in mind, we cannot be ignorant of the fact that when these creatures are indeed threatened they will respond and they will respond in force.

The audience discovers that there are two men on the grant committee, which supports Hank's research, that actually despise Hank's work and decide to sabotage it by poaching some of his stray cats. We follow them on their unethical safari as they shoot lions and leave their bodies behind since lions' pelts are almost worthless. There are close headshots of bloodied lions laying on the ground. No animals were actually harmed, but to see the faces of these creatures covered in blood because of a human's influence is absolutely heartbreaking. The individual shot is meant to drive a feeling of guilt into the viewer as they have to look at this drawn out image.

This is the first time we have seen violence against the animals that they did not do to themselves. It is jolting to the audience as they see just how sudden and merciless these killings are. Until now, the lions have been left to their own devices and the only violence they showed was to each other, property they see no value in, and a human only as an accident. Here, though, the animals were completely innocent and they were murdered for simply exploring their home. It is the equivalent of shooting a person in their own home. Since these animals do not have pelts that can be sold for a high price they are left where they were shot to die confused and alone.

Hank comes upon the bodies of the fallen lions and is brought to tears. He sees the beauty of the creatures and knows it is a disgusting waste to attack them for no reason other than petty jealousy and sport. The tigers even mourn the fallen lions and leave the bodies alone. It is important to note the relationship between Hank and the lions here. Especially when we have seen such a foil of the relationship in the previous scene.

He holds such a respect for these animals that one would think he was mourning a human being. Hank has been surrounded by these animals and has been accepted as part of the pride. He feels he has lost a close relative, but utilizes this anger to march on and get to his family and the people who have harmed his animals.

In the next scene, the two poachers come face to face with the menace lion, Togar. The poachers fire off their guns, but Togar proves to be too fast for them. The camera begins taking action shots as it quickly switches to Togar avoiding the shots while advancing on the poachers and the poachers firing their weapons and panicking at the sight of this massive, bloodied, angry lion. Eventually, Togar gets to the poachers and begins to tear them to shreds. The attack is quick, merciless, and extremely gory. The poachers are now completely out of the picture as Togar stand proud above their bodies eating away at their bloody corpses, just as they stood proudly above the lions they previously hunted.

Despite the horrific, karmic end to one story within the film, the story of the family ends much more beautifully. They escape the house on the reserve avoiding the wildcats as they go and eventually reach a little guesthouse untouched by the animals. They fall asleep as they have not been able to rest knowing the cats are wandering about. As they rest, the cats climb trees nearby the surrounding fence and infiltrate the guest house.

One would think, lions are so awful and terrifying that of course they will maul or eat the family while they sleep. This is not the case. In fact, the lions cuddle up with the family and they all sleep together as a single pride. Slow tracking shots follow the steady movement of the family and the lions as they all wake up only for the family to finally realize the lions do not mean them any harm.

It took first-hand experience for the family to learn what Hank spent the last year researching. Although the animals are massive, intimidating beasts they are capable of true, genuine kindness. The lions begin to hug, caress, cuddle, and lick the family members as if they were familiar with each other for their entire lives. The family quickly switches their attitudes about the cats and exchanges their mindset of fear for a mindset of acceptance and confidence.

Finally, Hank arrives at the reserve to find the family embracing the lions without a hint of fear as their faces light up to see him. They all hug and share stories of what happened as Hank begins to formally introduce the family to the lions while properly educating them on the rules of what and what not to do around the lions.

The film closes with a montage of Robbie the lion reasserting his dominance as alpha, the cats safely roaming the reserve, and the family and Mativo fixing the house and taking care of the lions. All the while, the song *Here We Are In Eden* by Robert Florkczak drowns out the natural sounds of scene to show the audience that all has been remedied and everything after the credits will turn out okay. Despite the reserve never directly being called Eden, one can understand how the term can be applied to this land. A natural paradise where there are no conflicts and a complete unity between beast and man.

Through the course of the film the audience follows three completely different stories that express three explicitly different emotions and understandings of the animals and their nature. Initially, we see Hank in a peaceful, synergistic relationship with the lions providing mutual respect and protection for each other. He loves these animals and they share a love for him as they all coexist on this reserve.

One might argue that they did not feel a love for him when the lions were fighting for dominance and even lashed out at him, but this actually further supports this idea. This implies that the lions actually acknowledge Hank as another potential alpha within the pride and treat him as just another lion fighting for dominance. Yes he is hurt, but so are the other lions. They did not attack him because he is a human, he was attacked because the lions see him as another lion in the pride. Even after the fight, Hank does not blame the animals for the injury, he blames himself for not being strong enough to fight a lion.

The next interaction we see is that of the family. They came into the reserve completely blind and clueless to what kind of research Hank was actually performing there. In an instant their ignorant entrance is abruptly interrupted by the flooding in of dozens of strange, wild animals with the capabilities of killing any of them in an instant. Panic ensues, furniture is destroyed, and lions are abundant.

It was only after the family awoke surrounded by the creatures did they realize they were not in any real danger. They transitioned from a genuine fear to a similar level of respect that Hank has for the lions. Where there was once screams there is now fawning over how loving and beautiful the creatures are. Their initial intuitions melted away to make room for a new understanding to take hold within them. Showing the audience that although it is reasonable to fear an animal so giant and dangerous, one must look past that to see the genuine beauty of these creatures.

We also follow the story of the poachers whose hate only begot hate. They sought out profit and gain where there should only have been admiration and respect. However, because they lacked this they lost their lives to Togar. This section of the film stands to show the dangers in senselessly hurting and hunting these animals for sport or enjoyment. Where the other two

stories tell of coexisting, this story tells of what happens when you resist nature and directly attempt to conflict with it. The poachers refused to learn from nature and live among the lions so they were rejected by nature and dealt with as such.

Through all three stories there are several lessons that can be learned, but there are two that stand out among the rest: nature must be respected and the best way to learn about nature and its creatures are to observe them in their natural environment. Anything and everything the cats did on screen were of their own nature and behavior. So if they were playful they were actually playful. This applies to their fighting and other loving tendencies as well.

Of course the poachers were not actually murdered, but every single scene where the lions showed affection to the characters was entirely genuine. Due to this natural style of developing a film, audiences can learn exactly how these creatures act around humans. They can observe the natural beauty of a pride of lions coexisting with an outside force. They can see the harm and dangers of threatening the wellbeing of the lions. By watching this film audiences are given a rare opportunity to understand the nature of nature and why it must be protected and defended.

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