

Can innocence brutally stolen be regained?

'Beasts of No Nation' impresses

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Movies

Can innocence, brutally stolen, ever be truly regained? In "Beasts of No Nation," Agu (Abraham Attah) and his family are caught in the crossfire of the civil war tearing their West African nation apart: corrupt government loyalists verses driven and devoted rebel fighters.

There are no "good guys" here, no moral high ground -- those with power take what they want from those who have none. Government soldiers who come to his town and accuse the locals -- including Agu's father, the village headman -- of giving aid and comfort to the rebels, take his remaining family from him in a brutal, irrevocable fashion.

Escaping through the jungle, lost for days and starving, the boy stumbles into the midst

BEASTS OF NO NATION

Abraham Attah and Idris Elba star in this unflinching look at the life of a child soldier as he fights both for his life and the remainder of his soul.

Not rated, but featuring disturbing scenes of violence and bloodshed.

★ ★ ★ ★

of a firefight between the loyalists and the rebels, and catches the discerning eye of the charismatic Commandant (Idris Elba.) Seeing the potential in the broken youth to be built up and indoctrinated as one of his fledgling soldiers, he takes Agu under his wing, placing him with a young group led by



"BEASTS OF NO NATION" tells the story of a child warrior in Africa.

Strika (Emmanuel Nii Adom Quaye,) a wordless adolescent who becomes both his friend and rival for the Commandant's attention.

This is not a film for the faint of heart: the military leader's child soldiers are remorseless in their killing, having lost the innocence of childhood long ago: now knowing only violence, the hunger for revenge and survival.

While it takes some time for Agu to embrace it, by the time he's mired in the quicksand of moral ambiguity, he's far too gone to care -- as he narrates later, "I am knowing the sound of people screaming, and the smell of dead

bodies...I saw terrible things... and did terrible things." And while he comes to realize that all that is in his future is unending war, he knows no way to escape, for fear of the ruthless Commandant.

"If I am telling you this, you will think that I am some sort of beast...or devil..." he narrates, "...and I am all of these things."

This film is produced by Netflix and is available on the streaming service as well as in select theaters, making it a strong contender for the upcoming Academy Awards season.

Directed and adapted from the novel by Cary Joji Fukuna-

ga, the director behind the first (superior) season of HBO's "True Detective," "Beasts" is also beautiful in its juxtaposition of the horrors of war contrasted by the beauty of the lush and flowering jungle, with the gorgeous cinematography bringing it all together.

"Beasts of No Nation" is a powerful and unrelenting film, with exceptional performances by both Elba and especially by newcomer Attah. Heartbreaking, moving and disturbing, this look inside the reality of a torn country's civil war, a boy's loss of innocence and the lengths individuals will go to to dominate and fight to take -- and keep -- power will haunt the viewer for days to come.