

The Beastmaster

US : 1982 : dir. Don Coscarelli : EMI / Ecta / Leisure Investments † : 118 min
 prod: Sylvio Tabet : scr: Don Coscarelli & Paul Pepperman : dir.ph.: John Alcott
[Josh Milrad](#); [Billy Jacoby](#)
 Marc Singer; Tanya Roberts; Rip Torn; John Amos; Rod Loomis; Ben Hammer; Ralph Strait;
 Janet DeMay; Chrissy Kellogg; Janet Jones; Tony Epper; Vanna Bonta; Kim Tabet;
 Daniel Zormeier; Tim Dunlavey

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ∅ M ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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[† elsewhere accredited to MGM / United Artists]

“ The epic adventure of a new kind of hero ”



Sword & Sorcery art conventions – the hero, though centre of the scene, is poorly defined and unimpressive, the ghouls and horrors to either side are vague, but centre of focus are the catastrophically exaggerated buttocks of a nubile handmaiden. Sword and saucy postcardery, more like.
 Source: indeterminate TV guide

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 1996 review:

“Yet another sword and sandal fantasy with **Conan / Tarzan** clone hero who communicates with animals (including, believe it or not, some comedic ferrets), falls in love with slave girl Roberts and seeks revenge against evil priest (Torn) who killed his father. Cinematography by

John Alcott (“**BARRY LYNDON**”).
 Followed by a sequel. ** ”

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

Another intelligence test for you: these are the four righters of wrongs. But the reviews only name **three** of them, so spot the odd one out.

Source:
indeterminate



Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A royal child, stolen at birth by a witch, is rescued by a peasant who brings him up skilled in the martial arts. Comic strip sword and sorcery: fairly high budget but very low intelligence. Scr: Don Coscarelli & Paul Pepperman. "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"A demented high priest enslaves an ancient people and demands they sacrifice their young children. Singer and Roberts strut their gorgeous bodies through this campy movie on their way to stopping villain Torn. Strictly for beefcake fans. * "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"A lively but absurd fantasy/adventure starring muscular Singer as a sort of mediaeval Tarzan who rescues a pretty slave girl (Roberts) from the clutches of barbarians. Singer pulls off countless heroic deeds with the help of his animal friends, which include two mischievous ferrets and an old tiger dyed black to look like a panther. Much silly dialogue accompanies the non-stop excitement. Rip Torn gets into the action as a sinister priest with a yen for sacrificing babies and virgins. ** "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Rehash of **"CONAN THE BARBARIAN"**, with another hunk-of-the-month in a leather thong, a crisp smile, and a Bucks Fizz haircut. He also has a posse of animal friends to highlight his existential aloneness: a panther is his strength, an eagle his eyes, and two possums to handle the rest. Sorcery, ham, various hordes and polystyrene sets stalk the land (looks like Apache country), with the routine of swordfights, narrow escapes and ancient prophecies occasionally enlivened by flashes of sicko – a living eyeball ring, fluorescent blood – from the director who brought you the disgusting horror **"PHANTASM"**. Warner VHS PES 38002 "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"When **"THE BEASTMASTER"** begins, it is very hard to tell what it is all about. An hour later, it is very hard to care what it is all about. Another hour later, it is very hard to remember what it was all about. From the early confusion, in which it seems that a cow gives birth to a baby boy, Marc Singer emerges as Dar.

Singer's destiny is to go after the villains led by Rip Torn to revenge the destruction of the village¹. Along the way, he teams up with two ferrets, an eagle, a panther,

¹ Or "avenge" as we say in English

Tanya Roberts and John Amos² and other assorted creatures of equal acting ability. Much of the time they are involved in rescuing each other from rather

² *Also – more importantly, in plot terms – Josh Milrad, but since he's a kid we shan't trouble to mention him*



Stills are one thing, but pectorals and biceps do not an actor make – nor a hero – and poor Marc Singer barely registers on the personality scale. Source: indeterminate

noninteresting situations³. Adapted from Andre Norton's novel. ”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“A young mediaeval warrior (Marc Singer) who possesses the ability to communicate psychically with animals takes revenge – with the help of a slave (Tanya Roberts) and a master warrior (John Amos) – on the evil sorceror (Rip Torn). It's fun for kids of all ages. Rated "PG" for violence and brief nudity. ***1/2 ”

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times reviews:

“Before history began there was a time of dark magic and high honour. It was a time in need of a hero who would triumph where others had perished. He would have the eyes and talons of an eagle, the strength of a black tiger and his own courage. A royal child stolen at birth by a witch, rescued by a peasant and brought up skilled in the martial arts, Dar was to be that hero – the Beastmaster. ”

³ Or “uninteresting”, for that matter

“Handsome hunk Marc Singer is the eponymous mixture of Conan, Tarzan and Dr Dolittle in this deliciously daft sword and sorcery fantasy. The beasts he commands include a panther, an eagle and two comic ferrets, the other extravagant support comes from gorgeous slave-girl Tanya (“**Charlie's Angels**”) Roberts and over-the-top evil priest Rip Torn. Don (“**PHANTASM**”) Coscarelli's film looks good thanks to John (“**BARRY LYNDON**”) Alcott's photography, but beware things like the living eyeball ring and the fluorescent blood. ***⁴ ”

“The hero of this sword 'n' sorcery yarn is not just holding his pet falcon, he is probably talking to it! A royal child stolen at birth by a witch, the Beastmaster can talk to the animals – and the creatures help him search for his true love, captured by an evil priest. Marc Singer, who plays the title role, can also be seen fighting evil alien reptiles over on Sky One in the cult SF series “**V**”. ”

“Fantasy starring Marc Singer, Tanya Roberts, Rip Torn. Dar has power over all animals but following a tragedy in his village, his life becomes a quest for vengeance. *** ”

“Animals are telepathic muscleman Marc Singer's best friends in this sword-and-sorcery adventure. ”

⁴ Why bother to actually watch the film when you can just crib from other peoples' reviews?

“A daft sword-and-sorcery fantasy adventure from director Don Coscarelli of **“PHANTASM”** fame. Muscleman Marc Singer is Dar, a prehistoric Doctor Dolittle, who can telepathically talk to jungle animals and uses them to battle evil magician Maax (an over-the-top Rip Torn), the plunderer of his barbarian village. Lots of glitzy special effects, zombie guards in bondage gear and some amazing animal stunts spice up the broad proceedings, and ex-**“Charlie’s Angel”** Tanya Roberts – who later went on to make the similar **“SHEENA, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE”** – features as a decorative slave girl. There’s also a laugh to be had from Dar’s two cute ferret pals that hang from his loin cloth. There was a belated 1991 sequel, **“THROUGH THE PORTALS OF TIME”**. Edited for some of its violence, and contains brief nudity. ***⁵”

⁵ “Edited”, in *Radio Times* speak, means “additionally censored by ourselves”

New kind of hero my orifice. Edgar Rice Burroughs was writing yarns of this sort long before Don Coscarelli's father had a twinkle in his eye. It's a stock sword & sorcery tale in every respect, if a tad less fascist in its muscle-worship than the "**CONAN**" films, and with the same leery adolescent sexuality that graced the cover of so many adult comics and heavy metal sleeves.

Aside from the more obvious spate of derivative SF movies, the phenomenal success of "**STAR WARS**" also triggered a smattering of fantasy titles in this vein, Lucas' trilogy having planted a foot firmly in each genre. Among them were "**FLESH + BLOOD**" (85) and "**LADYHAWKE**" (85), both starring Rutger Hauer. But while Hauer has undeniable screen presence, and is a better actor than many of his roles deserved, the two "**CONAN**" films (82 and 84) did little to enhance Schwarzenegger's thespian reputation, and "**THE BEASTMASTER**"'s chief liability, also, is its star, who has even less charisma or (pardon me) animal magnetism than TV "**Tarzan**" Ron Ely.

The film has little to offer beyond occasional flashes of the same quirky sense of the bizarre which Coscarelli demonstrated with "**PHANTASM**". It lacks the essential sweep of an epic quest, which it purports to be, and in place of Darth Vader offers us Rip Torn, scarcely able to keep a straight face, looking like some chartered accountant lured into a dodgy religious sect, replete with the obligatory child sacrifices.

Crude heterosexual wish dreams are a raging undercurrent of the whole sword and sorcery genre (witness its lucrative spinoff into computer gaming), so here we have a bare-assed muscle man for the women (and gays), a bare-assed Amazon for frustrated juveniles of all ages – and a bare-assed boy for anyone not catered to by the above. Josh Milrad, who does not rate a mention in the reviews (which all tediously point out the playful ferrets) is young prince Tal, bereft of his throne – remember those from the "**TARZAN**" films? – and unwittingly Dar's kid brother to boot. He's travelling incognito with black bodyguard John Amos, the only adult in the film to give a reasonable account of himself, when they run into the hero and his travelling menagerie. There's a fortress to be penetrated (a death star) and a sacrifice to be made (one of the bleeding ferrets gives its all to save the hero) before the boy can be restored to his rightful bare-assed perch (which brother Dar graciously cedes to him) and the Beastmaster can stride off nobly into the sunset, eager slave girl on his arm.

What was chiefly appealing about the desperately low-budget "**PHANTASM**" (79) – aside from well-judged flashes of humour, and the fact it inclined more to the "weird tale" than the horror movie – was Coscarelli making a resourceful and implacable 12-year old the driving figure in the story. Here Josh Milrad suffers the fate as Tarzan's Boy, and is strictly along for the ride. He does get wounded, but only so that big brother can modestly decline the throne in his favour. Nothing further is known about him. Billy Jacoby (half-brother of Scott, elder brother of Bobby), who appears momentarily as the young Dar, was 14. Never given lead roles like his siblings, he had a bigger one in "**BLOODY BIRTHDAY**" (80), was in "**CUJO**" (82), "**MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD**" (82) and later "**JUST ONE OF THE GUYS**" (85).

Two belated sequels were eked from the same slender idea: "**BEASTMASTER II: THROUGH THE PORTAL OF TIME**" (91) and "**BEASTMASTER III: THE EYE OF BRAXUS**". They did not grace too many cinema screens, and if Coscarelli's abysmal follow-up "**PHANTASM II**" (88) is any indication, should be avoided at all costs. The worst of sequels always diminish the lustre of the original film, and "**BEASTMASTER**" does not have too much lustre to lose. Still, if flesh-sucking wraiths, cackling witches and roast ferret are your thing, you could certainly do worse. And Josh on the pyramid is a sight for sore eyes.

See subject index under **ANIMALS & BIRDS**, [ARISTOCRACY / ROYALTY](#), **FANTASY / FAIRY TALES / FOLK TALES**, **HEIRS / HEIRESSSES / INHERITANCES** and **WITCHES AND WIZARDS**.