

The Lion King

Disney animation for children aged 7-70.

Simba the lion is disinherited when Ska his wicked uncle sets up the murder of Mafusa, the noble king and Simba's father. Mafusa is mown down by a stampede trying to rescue Simba. Ska started the stampede but guilt-trips Simba into thinking it's his fault that Mafusa died. Ska tells Simba to run away and then sends the baddy hyenas after Simba to kill him. However Simba escapes and is rescued from the desert of his misery by the devil may care smelly wart-hog and bright spark meerkat. Simba grows up and meets Nala his childhood sweetheart when she's out hunting. She begs Simba to reclaim his birthright, but he can't face the guilt of his past. However, Rafiki the wise baboon teaches him to face up to life. Simba returns to the kingdom and fights Ska who has now set up a corrupt regime with the hyenas which has sucked the country dry and turned it into an ecological disaster area. Ska is exiled and ripped to pieces (off-screen) by the hyenas who feel he has betrayed them. Simba takes his 'rightful' place on the throne, fathers a son with Nala and the film ends as it begins, with the lion king announcing the birth of his son to the genuflecting subjects below.

Classification Issues

Portrayals of violence and horror that could be disturbing to young children. Mafusa uses real violence to protect his child - he draws blood (3 red lines) on a hyena's face when he whacks it (reel 2, 335). However, he is a 'good' father in dire straits. But the first really strong emotional and violent scene is the stampede sequence (the start of reel 3) up to Mufasa falling to his death (reel 3 317). The sheer noise and number of stampeding wildebeeste is scary, and there's real concern for father and son dashing in and out of the hooves. However, the boy is rescued. The moment of horror is when the exhausted Mufasa is climbing up from the valley and Ska sticks his claws into Mufasa's paws (300) causing him to fall to his death (317).

Emotionally this is powerful - son sees father murdered. However, there is no blood drawn and when Simba goes to the dead body, it is still whole. The expression on Mufasa's face is peaceful - he seems to be sleeping and the scene recalls the earlier scene where Simba has woken Mufasa from his sleep. Although this would 'upset' a child, the emotions it pulls on - sympathy, loss, are in themselves not 'bad'. Having a feeling is presumably good, to have them in control and seen and felt in a safe context is presumably good - the whole Disney ethos is racked up in this movie to reassure children that things will work out: the recovery of life, the discovery of good (according to the book of Disney) is all the stronger because of the emotional investment made in Mafusa. This is fairy tale as learning the hard facts of life - and 'dad will die' is one of the fundamentals that gets learned sooner or later.

The murder is replayed (almost literally - Ska says 'where have I seen this before?') when Ska puts his claws into Simba's paws when he has Simba hanging over the cliff. (reel 5, 629) but Simba doesn't fall - he fights back. The fight (5,935) is very scary and stylistically borrows quite a lot from Bruce Lee type kung fu movies - the animals 'fly' in slow motion, rear up against one another - this is scary, but a real fight between good and evil. The problem is dramatically we know Ska is a wimp (by his own admission he's at the shallow end of the gene pool when it

comes to brute force) so he is bound to lose. It's grisly that it's heavily implicated that the hyenas rip him up (5, 1001) but it's suggested by shadow and soundtrack - nothing is seen.

Although it's right to consider these moments of horror, they are not exploitative, there is a strong moral context, and a narrative shape that tells of rebirth and happiness. The songs, humour and glorious colour all provide a context that children will find reassuring. Yes, it's as scary as Grimm, as scary indeed as the early Disneys (Snow White/Fantasia), but scary can be good. It's not necessarily protecting children to take away all shock from them. Kids have great big scary emotions of their own, the desire to kill (and fear of being killed) being one of them: to make this a PG seems to show a lack of confidence in children's own strength to understand. And mebbe vulnerable kids would take strength from it, not be scared by it.