



# Beasts of the Southern Wild

Autumn  
Season  
2012

Director: Behn Zeitlin, USA 2012, 93 minutes.

With: Dwight Henry, Levy Easterly, Quvenzhané Wallis

Made with mainly untrained actors the film won awards at Sundance and Cannes and in October this year the BFI Sutherland Award for the most original and imaginative feature debut in the London Film Festival. – ‘daringly vast, richly detailed’ (BFI).

**Peter Bradshaw (The Guardian) writes:** Benh Zeitlin’s debut feature is part film, part hallucination: a ripe and gamey piece of what you might call Apocalyptic Southern Gothic, ambitious and flawed but sprinting with energy. It’s set at the time of the Katrina catastrophe – though it could as well be happening hundreds of years in the future, when much-propheced climate calamities have come to pass. At other times it looks like some sort of modern-dress re-enactment of the distant biblical flood.



The setting is a fictional bayou territory, an eerily beautiful wetland called The Bathtub, because of the semi-permanent flood risk. It exists below the levee wall, indicating not merely that risk, but some suspension of the rules. The Bathtub is off the grid, a place where state or federal government is remote. When Katrina hits, the rising waters are not so much a destruction, more an intensification of the already existing chaos. A hard-drinking guy called Wink (Dwight Henry) lives in a collapsing shack with his six-year-old daughter called Hushpuppy, superbly played by newcomer Quvenzhané Wallis. Survival is now the key, but Wink and Hushpuppy realise that this is

only possible if the waters can be induced to fall by some desperate guerrilla measure – waters that are being kept high by the levee wall that is keeping the folks on the other side dry.

Beasts of the Southern Wild looks of course very like the work of Terrence Malick. The spaces and silences of the landscape echo Malick’s earlier movies, though the visuals are rougher and meaner here. But the humans are not the only beasts of this southern wild. Surely inspired by the bizarre dinosaur of Malick’s last-but-one film, *The Tree of Life*, Hushpuppy is beginning to see colossal porcine creatures looming out of the swamp.

‘Sometimes miraculous films come into being, made by people you’ve never heard of, starring unknown faces, blindsiding you with creative genius. “Beasts of the Southern Wild” is one of the year’s best films.’ (Roger Ebert)

