

Cocaine Bear doesn't have a problem – it just doesn't know when to stop

On some level, you do have to hand it to movies like *Cocaine Bear*, Universal's new black comedy from director Elizabeth Banks about a coked-up bruin gallivanting through the woods, mauling unsuspecting humans, and doing lines off its victims' dismembered limbs. Simply by spelling out and then relentlessly over-delivering on its ridiculous premise for an hour and a half, *Cocaine Bear* immediately sets itself apart (in a good way) from many of the more comedic "cerebral" horrors and thrillers the film draws inspiration from. But fun as the movie is, the same extra-ness that makes it work so well at first very quickly becomes more than a bit too much as *Cocaine Bear* keeps trying to up the ante when what it really needs is to slow down and chill out.

Kinda sorta based on the real story of the 175-pound black bear that became famous in 1985 for overdosing on cocaine lost by drug traffickers in Tennessee, *Cocaine Bear* imagines a reality where doing that much blow would drive a bear to go on a murderous rampage rather than kill it. No one's initially clued into just how much cocaine smuggler Andrew C. Thornton (Matthew Rhys) dumps out of his plane over the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest in a clever but ill-conceived attempt at hiding from the authorities during a big run. When massive bricks of the white powder begin to turn up throughout the park, though, it isn't long before Thornton's dump becomes the subject of a local news frenzy that puts cocaine on most everyone's minds even more than it already is.

For cops like Bob (Isiah Whitlock Jr.) and Reba (Ayoola Smart), the coke's a sign that known kingpin Syd (Ray Liotta) is making big moves, while people like Syd's son Eddie (Alden

Ehrenreich) and Eddie's friend Daveed (O'Shea Jackson Jr.) see it as a mess they're going to have to clean up. Between her new boyfriend and keeping an eye on her daughter, quintessential '80s mom Sari (Keri Russell) is too busy to pay all that much attention to whatever nonsense is going on in the forest. But when Dee Dee (Brooklyn Prince), Sari's middle schooler, and her best friend Henry (Christian Convery) decide to ditch school to hang out in the wilderness one day, they don't realize just how much danger they're wandering into or what sort of wild ride they're in for.



a:hover]:text-gray-63 [>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[>a:hover]:text-gray-bd dark:[>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray [>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63 dark:[>a]:text-gray-bd dark:[>a]:shadow-underline-gray">Image: Universal

The ironic thing is that being less violent isn't exactly what *Cocaine Bear*, a movie about an animal going apeshit, needs.

Rather, it's suffering from a curious bit of bloat stemming from just how many different subplots it tries to weave together as even more characters like European hikers Elsa (Hannah Hoekstra) and Olaf (Kristofer Hivju) and a trio of knife-wielding teens cross paths with the bear. Many of *Cocaine Bear*'s characters end up dying in funny-ish ways that sort of underline how you're not meant to become all that involved in any of their individual lives. But there are so *many* flatly characterized players running around in the woods waiting to get gobbled up that it becomes hard not to feel like *Cocaine Bear*'s an overlong *SNL* sketch in desperate need of a trim and a few rewrites.

Cocaine Bear's not without its charms, and both Convery and Martindale deliver exceptionally delightful performances that reinforce how just a little bit more substance for other characters could have done wonders to make them all more memorable. To really enjoy the movie, though, you're going to have to be in exactly the right kind of headspace and have a high tolerance for pure, uncut ridiculousness.

<https://www.theverge.com/23612160/cocaine-bear-review-elizabeth-banks>