



## Documentary wows but loses points with plea for financial aid

BY KEN DUSOLD  
Staff Reviewer

The struggles for the lioness named Ma di Tau on the plains of sub-Saharan Africa are numerous. To return home would result in the grisly murder of her offspring. To remain would leave her open to attack from her fiercest rival. Danger in the form of gun-toting villagers awaits the visitor daring to journey north. The river and wetlands situated to the south serve as the only source of optimism for this mother of three as she must quickly make her decision. Success is essential, as failure only offers death.

"The Last Lions" easily takes the prize of the most compelling and thrilling film of 2011, thus far. There are no actors, props, sets or script. There is only the natural beauty and events surrounding the day-to-day life of Ma di Tau, whose name means "Mother of Lions," and her three young cubs.

Filmmakers and fervent lion-welfare activists Dereck and Beverly Joubert, in association with National Geographic, are trying to build awareness for the dwindling number

of lions with this cinematic product of their deeply-felt love and tremendous care. The story's narrator is Academy Award-winning actor and voice of Disney villain Scar from "The Lion King," Jeremy Irons. His distinctive voice lends to the film a calming presence necessary to tell the harrowing tale of Ma di Tau as she attempts to overcome unending obstacles to see her cubs to adulthood.

Obstacles like losing her territory to a male lion set on destroying the last remnants of the territory's previous king — and Ma di Tau's mate. This requires her to move her cubs into new territory, bringing a cavalcade of new challenges, including crocodiles, hippopotami and lack of food. Due to human threats in the north, a massive herd of water buffalo moves into Ma di Tau's new home. While a delicious meal, they are ferocious and dangerous in large numbers.

As the film progresses, a threat as equally destructive as starvation and death by water buffalo manifests itself in the form of Silver Eye. This one-eyed lioness owes her semi-blindness to Ma di Tau — the victor in a past fight between the two huntresses. Silver Eye has a pride of lionesses that follows the unpredictable leader on a chase across the plains in search of Ma di Tau and revenge. A fight for survival ensues and status among the members of the



Photo courtesy of nationalgeographic.com

"The Last Lions" follows a female lioness from Botswana named Ma di Tau as she struggles to protect her offspring.

untamed and unforgiving African land, where only the most cunning and observant will win.

The film is not without its weaknesses. The first action sequence does not do justice to the reality of the story. The Jouberts' choice of monochromatic, almost sepia-toned shots of Ma di Tau and her mate losing their territory is unbecoming considering Irons' narration describing the film's truthfulness plays

over the same sequence. The sound mixing is lacking during a couple of key moments when Irons' voice and the natural sounds of the plains are overlapped with background music. The music actually adds little to the picture's already enthralling happenings.

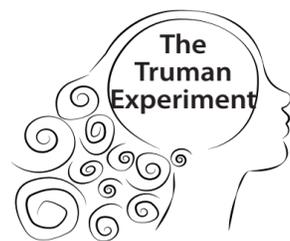
Most detrimental to the movie is the guilt-trip on which the audience is taken as the screen turns to black. As the credits begin to roll, the voice of

Beverly Joubert plays over video showing the filming of "The Last Lions." During her brief plea for aid, a phone number appears with instructions on how to donate \$10 to their organization through texting. While understandable considering their reasons for making the film, this telethon-esque call for cash cheapens the intensity of the story. Indeed, the film itself is a greater motivation to act on behalf

of the lions than anything humans can concoct.

Despite these few flaws, "The Last Lions" is terrific cinema. The film is unquestionably a documentary. However, it acts much more like an action-thriller, with compelling — and, of course, cute — characters. National Geographic and the Jouberts can take comfort in knowing their latest work is befitting this queen of the African jungle.

# Regulating emotions reduces compassion



## Study shows higher death toll doesn't mean more sympathy

BY ELIZABETH NECKA  
Columnist

As a person of pragmatism and logic, it is rare that I accept a conspiracy theory. But then Japan loses as many as 10,000 people in a deadly 8.9 magnitude earthquake, not to mention the nuclear power plant disaster, just more than a year after the devastation in Haiti. It is no wonder that the conspiracy theorists are touting claims of the world ending in 2012.

When it comes to tragedy, I'm definitely a crier. Some people bottle up their feelings inside, stone-faced on the outside. But I've grieved hysterically and quite audibly at every funeral I've attended in my adult memory. What can I say — I'm Italian. Yet, even as I am thinking about this horrible catastrophe in Japan and how devastated the citizens there must be, I don't cry or even choke up a little. What do I do instead? I change my

Facebook status to something shallow about my horoscope. And upon realization, I begin to feel like a horrible person.

Where is my compassion? The New Madrid Fault Line runs through the Midwest, particularly Missouri. If that fault line had shifted instead, it could just as easily be my family and friends left homeless, searching for their missing friends. It wasn't until a foreign exchange student friend of mine sighed with relief that her family was okay that it began to sink in. Until then, I was able to close my computer, text a friend and go out to a bar for drinks, being completely ignorant as I consumed myself in my bubble world. Don't these people deserve a moment of my good intentions? As a decent human being, shouldn't I give them an ounce of my goodwill?

I don't think of myself as a person of weak character, but it is intriguing how I was able to flip off a switch on my emotions and my thoughts when it came to the Japanese. In considering this, I didn't even examine any latent out-group bias, the tendency to treat people who are different from me in a negative manner, because my cold

reaction was not limited to the Japanese. I responded similarly to the quake in Haiti and to Hurricane Katrina. Though I've never admitted it before, I think the middle-school version of me cried more out of fear than out of compassion at the tragedy of 9/11. It's not that these events didn't bother me, because they did. It was more that my life moved on and I didn't hesitate to allow it to.

It's ironic that we should feel less compassionate towards the death of many people than we do toward the death of one — logic would hold that the compassion we felt would multiply by the number of people affected. This irony is called the collapse of compassion, and I feel a lot better knowing I'm not the only one who experiences it. Conventional psychology

states that when faced with surmounting numbers of affected people, we begin to consider them as statistics rather than as individuals, and we meet great difficulty trying to feel. Our emotional systems are simply not tuned in to mass suffering as well as they are to the specifics of individual suffering, regardless of how well we know the individual.

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