

Review: RSIFF title 'Black Dog' is an art house draw



JEDDAH: The winner of the Un Certain Regard prize at the Cannes Film Festival in May, Chinese drama “Black Dog” travelled to the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah and screened as part of the Festival Favorites program. Stark and suitably set in the barren landscape of the Chinese desert, the movie explores loneliness and exudes a sense of desperation. Director Guan Hu (known for “Mr Six,” “Run for Love,” “Cow”) follows a murder convict who leaves prison and lands a job as a dog catcher in a work that strongly reminded me of the celebrated Japanese auteur Takeshi Kitano.



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Lang (essayed by a grim Eddie Peng) is hired to trap strays in the Gobi Desert. But a man with a heart that melts, he watches in anguish as the canines are mistreated and decides to adopt one. Once a celebrity — a stunt motorcyclist, a great guitarist and the son of a bigwig — Lang's incarceration sees him transformed into a completely different person that is wonderfully encapsulated by Peng.

Strictly for art house fans, "Black Dog" can be a hard watch for others and the starkness of a part of the country with its decay and hostile desert sands is far from the allure that we often associate with cinema. Hu does not seem to care as he tells us with brutal frankness how dozens of dogs (some suffering from fatal rabies) are hunted down with a huge net by catchers — the scenes can be revolting to some.

"Black Dog" relies on one too many contrived incidents that impede the narrative flow, but if you're a fan of moody, almost allegorical films, this one is for you.
