

The Sand Castle: A takeoff on Robinson Crusoe

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There are times when *Netflix* drops some exciting films and series. The latest, which I quite liked, though I would not call it original, is *The Sand Castle*, a Lebanese story, helmed by Matty Brown—well known for his shorts like *Tangents*, *Mother's Love*, and *Distraction*.

The Sand Castle has similarities to Daniel Defoe's adventure, *Robinson Crusoe*. First published in April 1719, it is a survival story of Crusoe, who is cast away on an uninhabited tropical island for 28 years before he is rescued and brought back to civilisation. Tom Hanks's *Castaway* (December 2000) is something quite similar, with the actor essaying a FedEx troubleshooter who is stranded on a deserted island after his plane crashes and where he spends four years before he is found by a passing ship.

The Sand Castle is also about an island in the Mediterranean Sea, but here it is a family of four that finds itself stranded. With food and water scarce, the father, mother, daughter, and son have to literally scavenge to stay alive. They live on hope and pray that some passing vessel will spot them and take them back to civilisation.

What is very different and quite gripping is Brown, who wrote the script with Hend Fakhroo and Yassmina, turns his camera and attention not to the adults, not even to the teenage son, but to the little daughter, whose daydreaming irks her mother. She is Jana, played so cutely by Riman Al Rafeea. In fact, the movie's title hinges on her, rather than the sandcastles she builds on the beach. With her brother, Adam (Zain Al Rafeea), moody and bad-tempered, she finds a novel way to make

friends; they are the tiny ants. She watches them as they crawl on the sand, talks to them, and makes herself happy. She also feels tragedy when she spots a young girl's shoe on the seashore. Maybe someone died!

Although Jana's story captivates us, the helmer and the writers tend to ignore detailing the lives of the others. This part seems sketchy and disappointing. A bit frustrating too.

The direction is evenly good, and the cast too. If Riman scores high on the acting scale, Nadine Labaki, who plays the mother, is tops as well. Torn by the uncertainty and the perils facing her family, she brings to *The Sand Castle* the kind of angst we saw in her in the 2018 Cannes Film Festival hit, *Capernaum*.

The movie may not be everyone's cup of coffee, but for those who love cinema that is evocative, *The Sand Castle* is a great watch.



The writer is a senior movie critic

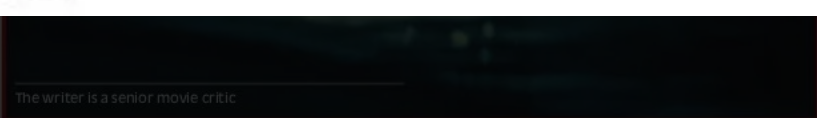


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