

Title: *Beasts of Prey*
Author: Ayana Gray
Genre: Fantasy

Reviewer Name and Grade: Eric Z., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: August 22, 2022

Beasts of Prey takes place in the city Lkossa and its neighboring jungle, the Greater Jungle, which are both part of a much larger fictional world. The story resembles and reflects on African culture, and if it took place in real life, it would likely be something that happened in the past. There are two stories ongoing in the book: The main story, and scattered throughout the book is a side story about a daraja, or a magic user, named Adiah, and how her decisions ultimately led to the existence of a beast known as the Shetani.

In the main storyline, a girl named Koffi along with her mother are indentured beastkeepers at an infamous place known as the Night Zoo, where many animals, some dangerous, are kept and brought to be showcased to audiences. But on the other side of Lkossa's social hierarchy is Ekon Okojo, who's lifelong goal was to become a Son of the Six, a revered group of holy warriors. So naturally, because they came from two very different backgrounds, they never met each other before a significant incident occurred:

When a fire started at the Night Zoo, Koffi along with her mother tried to run away, while Ekon along with the Sons of the Six arrived at the scene to stop the fire. Despite all of the commotion about dousing the fire, Ekon found out about Koffi and her mother's escape plans, and ran to stop them from running away, gravely wounding Koffi's mother in the process. But suddenly, right as Ekon caught up to Koffi outside of the Night Zoo, the Shetani shows up, and Ekon froze in place as he suddenly flashed back to memories of his father, who he believed was killed by the Shetani many years ago. But Koffi, who was somehow unintimidated by the beast, calmly told it to go, and to the astonishment of Ekon, the Shetani obeyed her command and left. In a daze, Ekon let Koffi go and didn't chase after her – a decision he quickly regrets, as his mistake was reported to a holy man named Father Olufemi as an intentional release of an indentured servant, who promptly declared Ekon's punishment, “‘Ekon Okojo,’ he said quietly. ‘Effective immediately, your candidacy for the Sons of the Six has ended. You are dismissed.’”

After this event, Ekon decides that in order prove himself as an honorable warrior, he must hunt down the Shetani. Meanwhile, Koffi, who's escape ultimately failed, bartered with her employer and managed to convince him that the Shetani could become his latest attraction at the Zoo, and that she is the only one capable of finding and bringing back the Shetani to him. Both characters proceed with their plans to find the Shetani, and in a stroke of luck, they meet each other in the holy temple of Lkossa, where Ekon lives and trains in. There, they made a deal: Since they both wanted to hunt down the Shetani, they would team up and find the Shetani together. From there, Ekon and Koffi traveled to the Greater Jungle together, facing the many dangers and mysteries of the jungle together, from a deceptive spider-like man, to a deadly beast known as a grootslang, to a tree with fruits that are only sometimes poisonous. Ultimately, the duo find out about the truth about an event known as the Rupture, as well as the origins of the Shetani, causing them to reconsider their actions as they learn more and more about the grand scheme of things.

Did the plot keep you interested?

Yes, the plot of *Beasts of Prey* kept me hooked to the story, as the two main characters Koffi and Ekon often had to think quickly to get out of sticky situations. Also, the side story of Adiah, which at first seemed to be a completely random addition, ultimately connected to the main storyline. Finally, near the end of the story, just like how it is with the side story, almost all of the dots that have kept the reader captivated are connected, which lets the reader fully understand and appreciate the lore of the story.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

At 474 pages, *Beasts of Prey* was a rather long book to read. However, I feel that the pacing of the book was just right, and that the book isn't long because it was poorly written, but rather because there was a lot to be written about the culture of Lkossans and the side story of Adiah.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

Beasts of Prey is suitable for grades such as 7th grade, as there aren't too many advanced words for readers to know.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I think *Beasts of Prey* is a great book for readers craving fantasy books, as well as readers who enjoy stories featuring African culture and history, which is scattered throughout the book in many different places.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Beasts of Prey does contain a small amount of romance between the two main characters, as they slowly become more friendly to each other as the story progresses. Also, the book has a sequel named *Beasts of Ruin*, so readers should know that the story doesn't end so quickly. But other than that, teens should be just fine picking up this book and reading it.

Overall, I would give *Beasts of Prey* a rating of 5 stars.

This is because overall it was well paced with a good plot, as well as a plot twist near the end. More specifically, the story has both slow, meaningful sections, as well as more intense moments when something bad happens. An example of a lesson given happens when Ekon talks with Brother Ugo, the oldest member of the temple, who told Ekon, "Nightmares hunt like beasts of prey, vanquished in the light of day." Brother Ugo also explained the meaning of this sentence, "Often, we run from painful things and hope that they will tire of chasing us. But in truth, avoiding our troubles simply gives them more sustenance, allowing them to eventually consume us whole. Only when we cast light on them and acknowledge them can they truly be vanquished, allowing our spirits to be free." Also, *Beasts of Prey* does use literary techniques such as imagery, allusion, and foreshadowing well, and isn't too hard to read and understand. Finally, the book has multiple characters of many different personalities, which helps bring the story to life and make the book enjoyable to read.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Dan W., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: December 3, 2022

The book *Beast of Prey* written by Ayana Gray shows that to achieve what you desire, you must have confidence, support from friends and from people who believe in you along the way. This is what Koffi had in her quest to bring magic back to her village which once was the

heart of magic. The setting in which Koffi's is in is in a magical world which is bordered off by being in parallel worlds of each other. The time period in which Iyichi was in is in modern time. Koffi's personality which is very strong with her is confidence, bravery and being adventurous. Koffi shows all these traits when everyone thinks that the magic is gone for good, but Koffi thinks he is not gone for good, by setting out on an adventure to restore magic back in her village.

The traits that Koffi lacks when going on the adventure to restore magic to her village is being willing to take criticism and being able to take advice from others. This is shown when Koffi is going to do the wrong thing by getting a very powerful amulet which has very powerful magic in it. Which was supposedly to restore magic to her village. But, ended up helping the Jaguar in accumulating all the power from it. She did this even when her friends told her that this is a terrible idea, and that there can be another way around it. The grade that I think this book would be appropriate for is for people from 6th to 9th graders because of the complicated words being put throughout this book. The rating for this book is a five out of five because this book explains with precise detail about what happened on Koffi journey with her friends to restore magic to there village, the plot and the setting of the book uses very strong words, but overall it is an amazing book for people that enjoy reading about a magical adventure in a magical world.

Teen Reviewer Name and Grade: Ashley L., Grade 10

Date Reviewed: March 17, 2023

In the crumbling city of Lkossa, magic does not exist, especially for sixteen-year-old Koffi, who possesses an ability that can only be characterized as magical and which, if discovered, could be fatal. Koffi, who is enslaved to the legendary Night Zoo, is aware that her sole priorities must be the terrifying animals in her charge and paying off her family's debts in order to guarantee their eventual liberation. However, when the people Koffi cares about are dangerously endangered by the ruthless Zookeeper, she ultimately unleashes a power she doesn't quite comprehend, which dramatically changes the course of her life. Ekon is almost certain that he will carry on a family tradition and become a Son of the Six, an elite warrior because he was the second son of a distinguished hero. Nevertheless, on the night of his last rite of passage, Ekon comes face to face with Koffi, who appears to have the ability to fend off the beast, as well as the Shetani, a violent monster that has terrorized the city for almost a century and stalks his nightmares. Ekon is ultimately saved by Koffi's abilities, but his decision to allow her to go ends any chance of him becoming a warrior. In an effort to atone for his transgressions, Ekon swears to track down the Shetani and put an end to its terror, but he cannot accomplish it alone. Koffi, meanwhile, thinks that locating the Shetani might potentially hold the solution to her own issues. Together, Koffi and Ekon venture into the Greater Jungle, a place full of unimaginable dangers and wild, terrifying power. The hunt starts. But it doesn't take long for it to become unclear whether they are the hunters or the prey.

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

The plot did keep me interested even though I thought this book would be boring and be about mythology and the rainforest.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was mostly just right. However, the beginning was a little slow and could be a little confusing.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

For Grades 8 and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

Readers who liked *Ravensong*, *The Moonlight Blade*, and *The Sweetest Betrayal* will like this book.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

The book accomplishes mythology and world-building.

3 stars: It was okay; I had hoped for better.

This book isn't as good as other YA books but it was decent. My favorite part was the plot twist. This book tests each character's loyalty, and their belief in each other. It was very interesting to see them finally trust each other and the progress it took. The cover is also very pretty, a lot prettier than the book. I also liked how one of the main characters had OCD as it was nice to see that representation.