

'The Revenant' is cold, brutal and unforgettable

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 156 min.

In the midst of Hollywood sequels and reboots that relentlessly follow a predetermined formula, it's great to see a big budget eccentricity like *The Revenant*. This is the type of film that clearly represents the personal vision of its filmmaker, melding western tropes with art house pretense. As a result of its unusual approach and icy tone, it's going to garner extreme reactions. But from my perspective, this change from the norm is always welcome.

Set in the 1820s, the story is fairly simple. Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio) is a guide for a group of fur traders in the wilderness. After a series of misadventures, a tragedy befalls Hugh and he is left for dead. However, the scout survives and musters every ounce of his being to keep breathing. Literally crawling from his grave, he sets out to wreak revenge on John Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy), the man largely responsible for his current predicament. There are a couple of subplots, but the majority of time is spent with Hugh.

This is a tale of endurance - in fact, the theme stated in the opening narration. Life is presented as brutish and grueling. Humans are stealing, abusing and killing one another, and when they aren't, the wild animals step in to attempt the same. The elements of nature itself are equally punishing, often finishing the job started by others. And so, the story is all about its lead character attempting to fight for his life even as everything around him attempts to take it away.

What really sets the movie apart is the photography. Shot in long takes using natural light, the

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camera follows the characters as they trudge through various environments and numerous perils. Every sequence is staggeringly choreographed and jaw-dropping to watch - the actors hit very specific marks on a massive canvas while the camera continues to follow the elaborate action for minutes on end (there are a few cheats, but they're seamless). These sequences include a graphic raid of the trader's camp, a brutalizing bear attack and a chase across the plains on horseback.

They're all incredible to witness. Admittedly, these lengthy takes result in shots and scenes extending over an incredibly protracted period of time. While some will take issue with the pacing, the technique captures the chaos of such a situation in an effective, real-time manner that adds to the feeling of panic. Frankly, the images of Emmanuel Lubezki (*Birdman*) are so striking all around, that just taking them in is captivating in itself.

Additionally, this is a solitary, cold and harsh story about frontiersman - none of whom are exactly charmers. In all honesty, it takes a while to get used to their blunt mannerisms. And so many terrible situations occur that the movie actually teeters on the brink of black comedy after a while. Thankfully, the very strong performance by DiCaprio kept this viewer engaged through the lengthy stone-faced trials and passages. It really is an award worthy performance.

And finally, director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu (*Birdman*, *21 Grams*) has a penchant for taking trippy asides involving oddball dream sequences (often involving figures floating in the air). These moments are a bit over-the-top and bizarre at times, but are always interesting.

The Revenant is certainly an acquired taste and won't appeal to all viewers. It's cold, ugly and brutal throughout. But that's exactly the point - giving viewers the experience of a fight to survive the harshest of elements in both nature and humanity. It is a unique, powerful and gorgeously filmed experience that one isn't likely to forget.

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