

NEW MOVIES REVIEWED AND RATED | DECEMBER 14—JANUARY 10, 2016

IMCinemas

EDITED BY JAMES JENNINGS

THE EMPIRE MOVIE GUIDE | UNMISSABLE ★★ ★★ EXCELLENT ★★ ★★ GOOD ★★ ★★ POOR ★★ ★★ TRAGIC ★

The Revenant

★★★★★

OUT JANUARY 7 / RATED TBC / 151 MINS.

DIRECTOR Alejandro G. Iñárritu
CAST Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Hardy, Domhnall Gleeson, Will Poulter

PLOT The harsh wilderness of America's upper-midwest, 1823. After fleeing a brutal attack from native Arikara warriors, fur trapper Hugh Glass (DiCaprio) is mauled by a grizzly bear. Betrayed and left for dead by fellow trapper John Fitzgerald (Hardy), Glass miraculously survives and begins a gruelling 320 kilometre trek to find Fitzgerald and exact his revenge...



BOTH ARRIVING FRESH OFF blackly comic satires about power mad men battling their own out of control egos, it's little surprise that director-writer Alejandro G. Iñárritu (2015's Oscar-scooping *Birdman Or (The Unexpected Virtue Of Ignorance)*) and actor Leonardo DiCaprio (Jordan Belfort in 2014's Oscar-courting *The Wolf Of Wall Street*) were drawn to *The Revenant*: an earthier — and resolutely humour-free — based-on-truth tale that has the far more primal concerns of survival and revenge locked in its unflinching sights. And while DiCaprio's pragmatic fur trapper and frontiersman Hugh Glass has his own internal demons to fight (not to mention treacherous work colleagues, boorish French soldiers and out-for-blood natives), the main event here is Man Vs. Nature — and it's a blood-soaked, bone-cracking and brutal tussle that will leave your nerves shredded by the time credits roll.



The narrative thrust of *The Revenant* is a particularly simple one — man must survive the elements and horrific injuries to avenge the murder of a loved one — but the basic premise only sets a wide canvas where master craftsmen like *Íñárritu* and cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki (Terrence Malick's go-to guy and Oscar winner for *Gravity* and *Birdman*) get to fully stretch their wings. The latter captures the ice-caked mountains, rivers and woodlands of Canada (where most of the film was shot) in nothing but natural light, and the results all but guarantee an Oscar hat-trick — Mother Nature's beauty and bleakness has rarely been portrayed on screen with such majesty and dazzling iridescence. *Íñárritu* takes full advantage of the remote locations with the lingering, meditative long-takes he used to such great effect in *Birdman*, presenting his actors with challenging scenes that were clearly

Leonardo DiCaprio, magnificent as embattled Hugh Glass — *The Revenant* of the title.

choreographed to within an inch of their lives. The stunning results speak for themselves: whether it's a heart-pounding raid from marauding Arikara warriors or Glass's lengthy mauling from a grizzly bear — a scene so intense that it'll have audiences contorting and gurning in phantom pain — *Íñárritu* has crafted an immersive film that is a technical marvel.

It's all for nought, of course, without a compelling lead, and DiCaprio's gruellingly physical and largely dialogue-free performance (it's a toss-up between Leo and co-star Tom 'Mad Max' Hardy who gets the least lines as a film's headliner) is what carries the film (the actor's *qaalude*-induced, Jerry Lewis-esque crawl to his Lambo in *Wolf* is a mere warm-up compared to the marathon crawling that occurs here). Domnhall Gleeson's expedition leader Captain Henry is a welcome noble presence and Hardy does good crazy (and another of

his famous semi-comprehensible accents) as Glass's nemesis Fitzgerald, but it's DiCaprio's show: as the 'revenant' of the title (an animated corpse who returns from the grave to terrorise the living), he is both haunted and ferocious, slipping between determination and defeat with heartbreaking regularity and showing steadfast commitment to the rigours required of his role (in the film the vegetarian eats a real raw bison liver and has a kip in an animal carcass that makes Luke's Taun Taun experience look like a cushy stay at the Park Hyatt). Your move, Messrs Bale and Gyllenhaal.

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VERDICT Like Glass's ordeal, the film is intense and at times almost too much to bear, but the journey will leave you in no doubt that you've witnessed filmmaking at its finest. Still, might be an idea for a whisky shot to come with your ticket.