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**movies** BY LOIS WADSWORTH



October, 2003: Timothy Treadwell and Amie Hugunard arrive at "Grizzly's Maze" within Alaska's Katmai National Park and Reserve.

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS, 2005

## A Fool's Paradise

Answering the call of the wild

**GRIZZLY MAN:** Documentary directed and narrated by Werner Herzog. Produced by Erik Nelson. Executive producers Erik Nelson, Billy Campbell, Tom Ortenberg, Kevin Beggs, Phil Fairclough, Andrea Meditch, Jewel Palovak. Production executive, Dave Harding. Cinematography, Peter Zeitlinger. Editor, Joe Bini. Music composed by Richard Thompson. Lions Gate Films, 2005 R. 103 minutes.

**B**eginning in the 1970s German filmmaker Werner Herzog made a string of fiction films that were strong enough internationally to make it to our shores, such as *Aguirre, The Wrath of God* (1972), *Nosferatu* (1978) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) among others. He's always been drawn to larger-than-life characters, whether fictional or actual, whose obsessions drive them outside the norm. Further, Herzog himself makes no distinction between his fictional film and his documentaries. Thus Timothy Treadwell, the self-annointed Gentle Warrior and protector of the wild grizzly bears living on the Kodiak archipelago became a natural subject for Herzog's cinematic scrutiny.

The result is a brilliant documentary work, shot after the death of Treadwell and his companion, Amie Hugunard, on Oct. 6, 2003 at a remote site Treadwell called "Grizzly's Maze" in Alaska's Katmai National Park and Reserve. Very late in the season, the campers were attacked, killed and eaten by an old, hungry male grizzly, not part of the group of animals Treadwell had spent 13 summers getting to know.

Much of the film is fabulous footage of the bears in their habitat shot by Treadwell, which shows them fishing for salmon, running through tall grasses, fighting with one another for dominance, approaching him down the rapids of a swollen river — the very picture of beautiful, untamed nature. But Treadwell inserted himself in his casual camping outfits and his Prince Valiant haircut into the bear's world. And he increasingly turned the camera on himself, becoming the subject of his films rather than an observer of the wild animals he both loved and feared. It's as if Treadwell played Truth or Dare with himself and lost, then documented the progress of his delusions for us to see.

Herzog interviews a number of people who knew Treadwell, including his parents,

who are clueless, and the woman who co-authored *Among Grizzlies* and co-founded Grizzly People with him, Jewel Palovak. It was important for the making of the film when Palovak, who controls the Treadwell video archives, became a hands-on co-executive producer of the film. Like many of the interviewees who supported Treadwell's work, Palovak has only good things to say about his idealism, dedication, persistence. She saw in Herzog "an unflinching honesty" as well as a similarity to Treadwell as "a maverick who would not give up on what he believes in."

As the film's narrator, Herzog was drawn to the project because he recognized in Treadwell's story the very aspects of human nature he's always been interested in — "the dark side, the demons and also the exhilarations and ecstasies," as he put it. But Herzog didn't go along with Treadwell's cozy contact with the animals. Instead of cuteness, Herzog said he saw in the great bears' eyes only "the overwhelming indifference of nature."

Others interviewed are blunt in their criticism of Treadwell, and they have a point. But I liked best the commentary of an Alaskan museum curator of Aleut Indian lineage. He said Treadwell had crossed a boundary of respect carefully maintained between humans and wild animals for hundreds of years.

What happened in the final moments of Timothy and Amie's lives is known only to two living people: the coroner and Herzog. One of Treadwell's cameras was running, with the lens cap on. The coroner savors sharing a few facts. But after listening to the audio tape, Herzog recommends that it be destroyed and never listened to again.

Toward the end of Treadwell's life, his filmed condescension toward his woman companion, her senseless death and his irrational mood swings show he was breaking down. The effect of Treadwell's vicious rants and infantile attitudes makes it difficult for me to respect his work. But Herzog never falters in his. You'll have to see the film to weigh in. Opens at the Bijou Friday, Oct. 14. Very highest recommendations, but with cautions.

EW

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**Elizabethtown PG-13**  
(1:00, 1:30, 3:45, 4:15) 7:00,  
7:15, 9:45, 9:55

**The Fog PG-13**  
(1:30, 4:00) 7:00, 9:20

**Oliver Twist PG-13**  
(1:25) 7:00

**Wallace and Gromit G**  
(1:00, 1:45, 3:15, 4:30\*, 5:30)  
7:00, 7:45, 9:15, 9:55 \*No 4:30  
show Sunday

**In Her Shoes PG-13**  
(1:30, 4:20) 7:10, 10:00

**Waiting R**  
(1:55, 4:45) 7:20, 9:40

**Serenity PG-13**  
(1:30, 4:10) 7:00, 9:40

**Greatest Game Ever Played PG**  
(1:45, 4:30) 7:15, 9:55

**Corpse Bride PG**  
(1:30, 3:30, 5:30) 7:30, 9:30

**Just Like Heaven PG-13**  
(2:00, 4:30) 7:00, 9:30

**40 Year Old Virgin R**  
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