

# The REVENANT



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by Alejandro G. Iñàrritu. Produced by Alejandro G. Iñàrritu, Arnon Milchan, Steve Golin, Mary Parent, Keith Redmon, James W. Skotchdopole. Screenplay by Alejandro G. Iñàrritu and Mark L. Smith. Based on *The Revenant* by Michael Punke. Production Design by Jack Fisk. Cinematography by Emmanuel Lubezki. Original Music by Ryuichi Sakamoto, Alva Noto and Bryce Dessner. Edited by Stephen Mirrone. Key Costumer: Jacqueline West:

Cinematic length: 156 minutes. Distributed by Twentieth Century Fox. The film has six different production companies. Cinematic release December 2015: Check for ratings. Rating 85%. All images taken from the public domain

## Cast

*Hugh Glass*: Leonard Di Caprio *Fitzgerald*: Tom Hardy *Captain Henry*: Domhnall Gleeson *Bridger*: Will Poulter *Hawk Glass*: Forrest Goodluck

*Hikuc*: Arthur Redcloud *Anderson*: Paul Anderson *Jones*: Luke Haas

*Elk Dog*: Duane Howard *Powaqa*: Melaw Nakahk'o *Glass's Wife*: Grace Dove

*Fryman*: Brendan Fletcher *Toussaint*: Fabrice Adde *Stubby Bill*: Joshua Burge

## Review



### *Hollywood's version of Hugh Glass and the nineteenth century version*

For an 1823 fur trapping expedition things go very wrong in the last stages, just as they are packing their riverboat for the voyage home. Hordes of Arikara suddenly attack and eleven survivors leave over twenty dead behind to reach their riverboat and drift off out of range. The eleven include their commander Captain Andrew Henry, their scout Hugh Glass and his son Hawk, a young Jim Bridger and John Fitzgerald. One of the others dies of his wounds and Glass warns Henry that if they

stay on the boat the Arikara will be able to track them and kill them. He advises them to take the overland route to reach the safety of Fort Kiowa. They are wise to follow Glass's advice, for the two who stay on the boat are pursued and killed.

The Indians are not pursuing them for their furs, or just to be ferocious, but to save Powaga, the chief's daughter, kidnapped by whites – but they are pursuing the wrong whites.

Things go very wrong when Hugh Glass is mauled by a bear and nearly dies. Initially the others carry him, but they cannot carry him over a steep mountain range and Captain Henry promises a hundred dollars pay each to three volunteers to stay with him until he dies or recovers. His son and Bridger volunteer out of decency, but Fitzgerald volunteers for the money. When Glass does not die Fitzgerald attempts to kill him, trying to get the speechless Glass to agree to being smothered by blinking. Glass who has to blink eventually, shuts his eyes. This is a man determined to survive and revenge against Fitzgerald becomes entwined with that initial determination, becoming the core of the film.



*The confrontation with the bear is truly scary – until hearing that it is a man in a suit*

Left in a grave, initially unable to walk, Glass must battle winter weather, starvation, the Arikara, his own injuries and his despair to travel to the fort.

This is much of the skeleton of the story, which I do not intend to spoil by revealing the rest. The narrative carries several subtexts. One is the conflict between humanity and savagery. Captain Henry's compassion, decency and generosity becomes almost a death sentence for him. It is a wonder that he survives as long as he does. He does not wake up to Fitzgerald, even when in the fort, the body language and voice tones convey that Fitzgerald lies to him and Bridger in his obvious remorse appears as even more revealing. Captain Henry does not question why he will not take the hundred dollars reward. It is Glass who knows to leave the river to survive, Henry survives by following his instructions. Sometimes goodness and blindness are not far apart

In contrast Fitzgerald sees much with the visceral eye of a hungry vulture. He appears as very much the traditional villain, being greedy, disloyal, bullying and deceitful. He even has the main accoutrements of a contemporary Hollywood villain – a southern accent and racist opinions. Although he works as a mountain man, this is not what he wants to be. He dreams of being a rich Texan farmer. His love is for money, and it is a devouring love even greater than his self-survival instincts. This becomes obvious when in the Indian raid he is more worried about the valuable furs than the loss of life going on around him and the obvious threats to his own life. When it is in his self-interest to knife an unarmed boy he does so without the slightest delay or guilt. He is a classic example of Somerset Maugham's concept that poverty does not make people noble or good, it makes them envious, vicious and desperate.

Glass has several aspects of the traditional hero. He has their luck and capacity for survival when most mortals would die. He has astuteness, about people and about his environment. Like traditional heroes he shows extraordinary courage and battle skills, forbearance and a sense of justice. The sedulous energy, common with archetypal heroes fuels his determination to survive. In fact he is determination incarnate.

The embodiment of characteristics and archetypes within the characters is only one subtext. The environment is another.



*Tom Hardy as Fitzgerald*



Director/Writer/Producer Alejandro G. Iñàrritu refused to use photoshop and other similar tricks for his landscapes. Good on him, for one of the film's greatest strengths has to be his use of landscape. He filmed in Alberta, Argentina and in the American rockies. The extraordinary beauty of the film's landscapes can be both overwhelming and yet dangerous; a bear rushes out of the braken, suddenly Indian arrows just miss, twacking into the tree behind Glass, magnificent rapids nearly drown him, a wolfpack looms amidst the snows and the snow itself can be a killer, yet in that winter white starkness great serenity dominates. Are the filmmakers indicating that people are the problem in a world that is beautiful? Or are they the victims of this tough, beautiful and dangerous environment? Are they made tough to do what they have to for survival? Are they destroyng this beautiful world? The answers are not given, read your own meaning, good.

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