

`Grizzly' Ending, Spooky `Asylum,' Dumb `Brothers': Rick Warner

(Review. Rick Warner is the movie critic for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

By Rick Warner

Aug. 12 (Bloomberg) -- Timothy Treadwell was a failed actor and former drug addict who spent 13 summers living among grizzly bears in Alaska -- right up until the moment he and his girlfriend were eaten by one in 2003.

He also was a manic narcissist who left behind more than 100 hours of videotape he shot of himself and the bears. That footage is now the basis of a remarkable movie by famed director Werner Herzog that raises disturbing questions about Treadwell's mission as an `eco-warrior' out to save his beloved bears and their natural habitat.

`Grizzly Man' is not your typical nature documentary. Unlike Treadwell himself, it doesn't treat grizzlies as cute, furry pets in need of some tender loving care. Nor does it demonize the fearsome animals, who can kill a man with one swipe of their giant paws.

Herzog takes a more complex look at his subject, interspersing Treadwell's tapes with interviews of his friends, family, wildlife experts and others who offer wildly divergent views of his life and death.

To some, Treadwell was an environmental visionary. To others, he was a tree-hugging nutcase who misunderstood the nature of grizzlies and their relationship to human beings. Herzog, in his German-accented narration, leans toward the latter group, though he does express admiration for Treadwell's passion, energy and dedication.

Mr. Chocolate

Treadwell, who usually wore shades and covered his blond Prince Valiant hairdo with a bandana, treated live bears like they were the adorable stuffed variety you buy in toy stores.

He got close enough to touch them, talked to them, even gave them nicknames like Mr. Chocolate and Aunt Melissa. He delivered long, impassioned monologues to the camera about how the bears saved him from a dead-end existence and how he was determined to protect them from various evildoers who were trying to destroy them.

But none of that prevented one hungry bear from using Treadwell, 46, and his 37-year-old girlfriend, Amie Huguenard, as an appetizer one day at Katmai National Park in Alaska. After their remains were found, not everyone was sympathetic.

``He got what he was asking for,' ' Sam Egli, a helicopter pilot who helped remove the few remaining body parts, told Herzog. ``He got what he deserved.' '

Sickening Sounds

Treadwell's camera was running when the fatal attack occurred. There's no video because the lens cap was on, but there is an audiotape of his final moments, which Herzog wisely chose not to use in the movie.

Instead, the director does something even more chilling: He films himself listening to the tape on headphones in the presence of one of Treadwell's former girlfriends. Horrified by what he's hearing, Herzog turns off the tape and tells the woman to destroy it before it becomes ``the white elephant' ' in her life.

White elephants, it seems, can be as dangerous as brown grizzlies.

``Grizzly Man,' ' from Lions Gate Films, opens today in New York, Los Angeles and other selected U.S. cities.

`Asylum'

When ``Asylum' ' begins, Stella Raphael (Natasha Richardson) is the wife of a psychiatrist who has just been appointed deputy superintendent of an insane asylum in the English countryside. Before the movie is over, she's a patient at the same gothic institution.

Her dark passage forms the heart of this stylish tale of ``erotic obsession' ' set in the 1950s, based on a novel by Patrick McGrath and directed by David Mackenzie.

Stifled in her marriage to Max (Hugh Bonneville), an ambitious but emotionally repressed shrink, Stella seeks comfort and ardor from inmate Edgar Stark (Marton Csokas), a ruggedly handsome sculptor confined for murdering his wife in a jealous rage.

After Edgar escapes in the trunk of a car, he contacts Stella and they resume their affair during her visits to the ramshackle London warehouse where's he's living with a former student. Eventually Stella leaves Max and moves in with Edgar, but the police track her down and she ends up back with her husband in dreary Wales, where he's found a new job after being fired because of his wife's scandalous behavior.

Stella, enchantingly played by Richardson, completely cracks up after Edgar is captured and her young son drowns as she looks on in a dreamy daze. She's then committed to her husband's old asylum and treated by the elderly superintendent

Dr. Cleave (Ian McKellen), a lonely man who specializes in
``sexual pathology.''

Cleave convinces Stella to marry him, but it's worth noting that this is a marriage made in a loony bin, not heaven. Don't expect a happy ending.

``Asylum,' ' from Paramount Classics, opens today in New York and Los Angeles.

`Four Brothers'

John Singleton's new movie, ``Four Brothers,' ' is a pandering, nonsensical, racially confused story about vigilante justice. In that spirit, I hereby sentence it to death.

After their adoptive mother is murdered during a grocery-store holdup in Detroit, the four Mercer brothers (two black, two white) are bent on revenge. Of course, you'd be too if your mother was like theirs, a combination of Mother Teresa and Father Flanagan who nurtured juvenile delinquents like they were stray puppies.

The brothers end up going to war with the local gangster who ordered the hit on their mom, a battle that involves more shootouts than ``Saving Private Ryan' ' and more trash talk than a Mike Tyson press conference.

Three of the brothers are played by Mark Wahlberg, Tyrese Gibson and Andre Benjamin, who all enjoyed success as rappers before becoming actors. This film may boost their street cred, but otherwise it's a fraud.

``Four Brothers,' ' from Paramount Pictures, opens today across the U.S.

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