

Rescue Dawn

There is probably no more versatile film director working than the German Werner Herzog. Known both for his numerous feature films (*Aguirre, Wrath of God, Nosferatu*, etc.) as well as his distinctive documentaries (the compelling *Grizzly Man* was his last), Herr Herzog tries a fictional version of a story he has already told as a true-life adventure in *Rescue Dawn*. It's the story of Dieter Dengler, an American Navy pilot who was shot down over Laos in 1965 in his maiden voyage but was able to escape, by native wit and sheer personal drive, from an obscure prison compound months later.

This is yet another prison-camp-from hell movie, and surprisingly for Herzog--whose style usually runs towards the eccentric if not the bizarre--he plays this one pretty much straight. And it's a corker. The true story is, perhaps, so unlikely and extraordinary that he doesn't need to embellish it.

Christian Bale, yet again sacrificing his body for a filmmaker, plays Dengler with a combination of open naiveté (German by birth, he has become an unblinking U.S. patriot) and practical cussedness that sees him through. He is seconded effectively by Steve Zahn as another American captive who needs someone of Dengler's zeal to merely glimpse the possibility of escape.

The Thai jungles stand in for those in lush Laos, and you may feel just as sweaty and exhausted as Dieter Dengler does as you watch him fight his way through them. Forget that television crap, this is one very serious "Survivor." (*The film is rated PG-13" for some sequences of intense war violence and torture.*)

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