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Answer all of the questions at the end, in complete sentences. You have this period to complete this.

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When the Limits Push Back

By [WILLIAM YARDLEY](#)

RISK is often relative to the person taking it. Ask any mountain climber, Wall Street investor or newly arrived immigrant. But what about a self-styled friend of grizzly bears?

“There is no other place in the world that is more dangerous, more exciting, than the grizzly maze,” Timothy Treadwell said of the remote area of the Alaska Peninsula where he spent summers living among the bears. “Come here and camp here. Come here and try to do what I do. You will die. You will die here. You will freaking die here. They will get you. I found a way. I found a way to survive with them.”

Soon after Mr. Treadwell’s comments were captured on videotape in 2003, he was eaten alive by a bear. There are risks, it seems, and then there are very, very bad ideas.

Mr. Treadwell was not the first or last risk taker to stir controversy and fascination for pushing the limits, sometimes fatally, and to prompt the inevitable question, “What were they thinking?”

The public appetite for the psychological intricacies of risk is being served by the release of two new movies about people who sought out extreme environments, then died in them.

“Into the Wild,” based on a best-selling book by Jon Krakauer and directed by Sean Penn, tells the story of Christopher McCandless, a young man who hiked alone into the Alaska interior in spring 1992 while on a mission to shed the world.

And “Deep Water,” a documentary, explores the unraveling of a British engineer-turned-adventurer, Donald Crowhurst, who set out alone to circumnavigate

the world, without stopping, as part of a sailing race in 1968 for which he was wholly unprepared.

Some might see all three men the way a helicopter pilot who helped collect Mr. Treadwell’s remains saw him.

“He got what he deserved,” Sam Egli said in the documentary about Mr. Treadwell, “Grizzly Man.”

Perhaps that may be a bit callous.

C. Robert Cloninger, a professor of psychiatry and genetics at [Washington University](#) in St. Louis, said ambitious adventures often reflected a desire for inner exploration, for renewal.

“The need for heroic transformation is very deep in the human psyche,” said Mr. Cloninger, author of “Feeling Good: The Science of Well-Being.” “They’re in a struggle with themselves and their life that they’re rejecting,” he said. “When they go into the wilderness or the ocean it’s in the hope of purification, when really the lesson that is needed is self-acceptance.”

And all risk takers are not alike.

Take the wealthy adventurer [Steve Fossett](#), celebrated for his solo circumnavigation of the globe in a balloon. Last week, the search continued for the small plane he was piloting that apparently crashed in northern Nevada as he was scouting out locations for his next adventure — an attempt at the land-speed record. He had not filed a flight plan, though he was known as a meticulous planner.

Mr. McCandless was anything but meticulous. He said he was seeking transcendent Self in the wilderness, whatever the consequences. “I am reborn,” he wrote in a journal the summer he died. “This is my dawn.”

By August, unprepared for surviving in the wild, he starved to death.

Likewise, Mr. Crowhurst was apparently better at dreaming up his mission than at completing it.

“One’s psychology has to be fairly stable, and one has to be constantly aware of the risks one is running,” he said shortly before beginning the race in October 1968.

The following July, adrift off South America, having lied about his progress and fearful of the humiliation and financial ruin he thought would await him at home, he

apparently committed suicide at sea. His body was never found. "It is the end of my game," he wrote in one of the final entries in his log book.

His wife, Clare, said in the film: "I feel that I failed. I didn't stop him from going and I didn't help him when he needed it. But people need to dream. I think Donald needed that, and he had a right to have it."

The pursuit of dreams, adventure and risk crosses some of the same mental geography, experts say, but motives can be different, from a raw need for thrill or attention to physical challenge, spiritual enlightenment, intellectual discovery or something darker.

Frank Farley, a psychologist at [Temple University](#) who has studied risk takers, cautioned against dismissing them as unstable.

"Risk takers aren't crazy at all," said Dr. Farley, a former president of the American Psychological Association. "They don't want to die. They want to live for another exciting day, another interesting day." Yet some people, perhaps affected by mental illness, overstep boundaries, he said, "and then there's a kind of overlay of irrationality."

Dr. Farley said risk takers, although found across cultures and countries, take up a disproportionate share of the temperament spectrum in the United States, which was populated by waves of people who risked everything to come here to start new lives.

Robert Morgan, a novelist and the author of a biography of Daniel Boone to be published next month, said that Mr. McCandless's story has direct links to notions of discovery that Boone and, later, Lewis and Clark, helped etch into American myth.

"He's aspiring to that ideal, which is very American, of being self-reliant and alone in the wilderness," Mr. Morgan said. "But he lacks the savvy to do it."

So do most people, even though they like to watch others take risks, whether in the wild or elsewhere. The film's promoters are trying to tap into this with adventure-travel giveaways, a bus tour and a blog.

"That paradox has been around for a long time," Mr. Morgan said. "This dream of solitary wilderness is within us. We just can't give it up, even though we're all sitting around in the suburbs with cellphones and watching TV."

In making "Grizzly Man," the famed director Werner Herzog edited more than 80 hours of video that Mr. Treadwell shot over several summers. Mr. Treadwell, who had struggled with alcohol and personal problems, said he had found his purpose in living among and, in his mind, protecting the bears.

"It is not so much a look at wild nature," Mr. Herzog concluded in the film, "as it is an insight into ourselves, our nature. And that, for me, beyond his mission, gives meaning to his life and to his death."

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Mr. Drake's English classes

Write all of you answers on the paper provided.
Write neatly.

1. **Summarize this article in 3-5 paragraphs. Write in complete sentences.**
2. **Explain the author's purpose for writing this article.**
3. **What is the biggest risk you've ever taken?**
4. **Would you take the same risk again today? Why or why not?**
5. **Why do people take extreme risks?**
6. **Write you personal comments on the subject of taking great risks.**