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Into the Deep

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Into the Deep

Abstract

This is a film review of *Into the Deep* (2020) directed by Emma Sullivan.

Keywords

Murder, Psychopathology

Author Notes

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Into the Deep (2020) dir. Emma Sullivan

This documentary offers one of those unique situations where someone was in place and recording footage as a specific moment in time when things take a “turn.” Emma Sullivan had a grant and was tasked with making short documentaries across Denmark. The focus of one of these was Peter Madsen, known as an amateur inventor. One year after Sullivan met Madsen, he was accused of the murder of Kim Wall, a well-known and promising freelance journalist, on his homemade submarine.

Sullivan returns to Madsen’s lab and continues talking to his team, primarily a group of 20 somethings that he surrounded himself with. Although he had no real formal training, Madsen was charismatic and seemed to gather young people towards him, as many worked and volunteered for the project. Even from a casual observation of the lab, with him at the centre and youth in jumpsuits, there’s a definite cult feeling. For many people, Madsen was showing them inclusion where they seemed to be struggling before.

With our new information, previous facts and footage of Madsen are seen through a new lens. His open marriage is regarded with some confusion, and his jokes about murder and his acting out of how he would lobotomize one of his staff members, are shocking. His reputation as a womanizer is seen as more suspect in this new context.

True crime aficionados may lament the lack of detail surrounding the crime. It is probable that some details will never be revealed, and Madsen has changed his story a handful of times. Information in the press is still lacking. As for motivation, some of his team postulate that Madsen had this attitude that he wanted to try everything in the world but also lacked any moral compass. It may surprise the viewer that he committed one murder and was caught, but given the nature of the crime there was probably also sexual sadism which may have led him to commit murder with more of a compulsion than a calculation—and therefore, his choice of victim and location made him easy to catch immediately and to be charged for his crime.

From a moral and ethical perspective, the film gives us lots to chew on. Despite dealing with a terrible crime—Wall was dismembered, and Madsen was clearly premeditating killing someone, although possibly not Wall specifically—it is not graphic. However, there are moments that spin you into confusion and a sense of dread. It becomes clear that Sullivan or any of the women working at the lab could have been Madsen's victim. And in one chilling episode, Madsen talks to Sullivan on tape about the possibility that he is a psychopath. This film is worth a watch for anyone interested in the creation of cults, as it interviews his team before and after the murder, and provides some interesting insights about why people were drawn to Madsen in the first place.