

‘The Rescue’ takes viewers into a hold-your-breath cave rescue

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Places hobby cave divers in heroes' spotlight

Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 106 minutes

This movie is available to stream as of Dec. 3 on Disney+.

Back in the summer of 2018, many were captivated by an unusual story in the news. On the other side of the world in Thailand, a soccer team comprised of young children had disappeared while visiting Tham Luang Nang Non cave at the border of Myanmar. After a torrential downpour, the area had flooded and most assumed that the group had perished. But as the days passed, the story suddenly morphed into a daring and dangerous rescue mission.

The National Geographic documentary “The Rescue” recounts exactly what happened, giving a clearer picture of events through interviews with the participants, never-before-seen footage

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from the site, as well as a few reenactments.

Many likely wondered exactly how this tragedy could have happened. The film relays the details of that fateful morning. The team was celebrating a birthday, taking a brief trip to a local park and cave they were all familiar with. This site was open to the public, but set to close within a couple of weeks in anticipation of monsoon season.

Sadly, the torrential rain came early, causing rapid flooding and forcing them deeper within until they were completely cut off from any exit. As noted, the film delivers important and clarifying information in a quick and efficient manner, also providing graphics of the cave layout to get a better understanding of the area and geography. This tactic also establishes the threat and danger involved.

Documentaries frequently have a difficult time relaying past events and still creating an aura of tension and excitement, but this film has no trouble doing so. Despite how recent and familiar the story is, the real-life cave setting creates a sense of claustrophobia. Additionally, the filmmakers generate more anxiety by telling this story in a straight-forward and linear manner. The participants frequently note how little time is left for the youngsters before the flooding water either drowns them or their oxygen runs out.

This ticking clock effect creates ample stress as unexpected complications arise.

Naturally, while there are many heroes involved (including various government special ops forces), the real focus ends up being an unusual group of eccentrics who stepped in to provide much needed assistance. The Thai Navy SEALs and others initially step in, but the movie shows British caver/mapmaker Vern Unsworth as the man who really gets the rescue moving. When the best-trained men in the country find the flooded caves too difficult to squeeze through and impossible to see in, Unsworth builds a list of the best hobbyist cave divers in the world. Richard Stanton, John Volanthen and several other men are recruited and tell incredible stories.

These average men are the leads of the story, detailing their unusual hobby and how it helped save lives. They reminisce in a frank manner, sharing their own motivations and fears while carrying out dives, as well as how they slowly became more personally engaged in saving the children. The filmmakers aren't afraid to detail the troubles they experienced, including a first

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dive that doesn't end up locating the kids, but rather a group of pump workers who were trying to drain water from the cave before being trapped. Over the course of the running time, viewers also see them deal with other issues, including a final operation rife with unexpected troubles.

This includes creating a non-deadly drug cocktail to prevent panic in those being transported for three hours under muddy water. Additionally, the movie generates anxiety when one diver recounts accidentally releasing his grip on a rope and becomes lost while trying to return with a boy.

And while this critic generally doesn't appreciate reenactments, its use is understandable in this case to help viewers get a vantage point of swimming in caves and maintain drama during the climactic rescues. It's always a positive when a documentary provides new insight and information that viewers may not have known about a particular subject. "The Rescue" successfully communicates what occurred through the eyes of the central participants, making their accomplishments all the more impressive. The movie is so compelling that one can easily see it being nominated for awards at the end of the year.

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