

' Aileen ': How a ' Monster ' Was Made

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Was Aileen Wuornos a victim or a serial killer? Or a little of both? **Was** she lucid or insane when she **was** executed or, again, a little of both? **How** close is Charlize Theron's portrayal in the Hollywood movie " **Monster** " to Wuornos? And **how** close is the movie's account of her life to the truth?

These and other questions ping around the brain like balls in an endless pinball machine game as you watch " **Aileen** : The Life and Death of a Serial Killer."

Nick Broomfield's nuts-and-bolts documentary may be a zero in the pizzazz department. (And with the possible exception of Michael Moore, he may be the most annoying documentary filmmaker in the business.) But the film provides an opportunity to study one of history's supposed anomalies: a female serial killer. It's men who do these things, we're told. For every Lizzie Borden, there are a hundred Richard Specks or Jeffrey Dahmers. What is it about this woman? You watch with morbid fascination.

" **Monster** ," for which Theron has been nominated for an Oscar, makes its own creative assertions: The first murder (of Richard Mallory) happened after his brutal rape attempt, and this trauma profoundly affected her. After that, she killed again primarily to finance her newfound love affair with a hard-drinking girlfriend. But for that first catastrophe, the Theron film all but states, she'd be just a redneck lesbian with a hooker habit.

"Serial Killer" shows us **how** eerily close Theron's performance **was** to capturing the belligerent, snaggle-toothed Wuornos. But it also shows that spending time with the real McCoy provides few answers; only more questions.

No matter what her reasons, **Aileen** Wuornos killed seven men on Florida highways. (She **was** executed last year.) Wuornos **was** a highway hooker with a .22-caliber pistol. Some or all of those killings started **as** potential sexual transactions. At least some of the victims, however, may have just stopped to pick up a lonely hitchhiker. All of the victims were robbed and their cars stolen.

Broomfield, a British filmmaker, **made** the 1992 documentary " **Aileen** Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer," which supported Wuornos's view that Florida police officials and some of Wuornos's friends and family collaborated to leverage a fat movie deal out of her killings. In the latest film, he reasserts this point of view, suggesting there's been a coverup of the police investigation into the movie deal his earlier documentary exposed. (One of Broomfield's weaknesses is making assertions that aren't backed up; another is that he spends so much time talking about himself.) And he reunites with Wuornos on Death Row. By that point, she is desperately trying to speed up her execution.

After greeting Broomfield like **a** long-lost pal and adjusting her hair with **a** swoop of her head, Wuornos makes **a** stunning announcement. She really did kill those people, she asserts. She didn't commit murder for the "thrill-kill," but she did it for money. She lied during her 1991 murder trial, she says, when she claimed she killed in self defense.

Then comes an even bigger stunner. Apparently unaware that Broomfield's camera is running, she tells Broomfield the announcement she just **made** is **a** lie. She's telling these lies, she half-whispers to Broomfield, to hurry her execution. She's tired of waiting to die.

Broomfield spends the remainder of the movie outlining the sad story of Wuornos's life. She **was** incestuously abused; she **was** forced to live alone in the woods **as a** child; the tragedies seem endless. He also tries to get Wuornos to come clean about the killings. Unfortunately, at this point, it would be hard to believe anything she says. If there **was** ever **a** compass that would point to the truth about **Aileen** Wuornos, it's shattered now.

As the film makes brutally clear, Wuornos had **a** fairly tenuous grip on reality toward the end. For example, she told people that after her death she would be going to heaven and coming back to Earth with Jesus in **a** spaceship like the one in "Independence Day."

Wuornos **was** unambiguous about one thing: She wanted to die. In the end, that's the only assurance the movie provides. It's an odd kind of closure for her and for us.

Aileen Wuornos: The Life and Death of **a** Serial Killer (87 minutes, at Landmark E Street Cinema) is not rated and contains graphic sexual comments and vulgarity.

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