

Written by Mike Schulz  
Sunday, 22 August 2010 15:24

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**PIRANHA 3D**

Alexandre Aja's *Piranha 3D* puts you in the unexpected position of actively rooting for the piranha, not because the effects are all that great (they're actually pretty awful), but because more flesh for the fish means fewer irritating humans to put up with.

This CGI-happy horror flick finds thousands of toothy bottom-dwellers taking over an Arizona town's previously tranquil lake during spring break. It's unclear whether the fish *knew* they'd arrive during the filming of a porn-y,

*Girls Gone Wild*

-esque video shoot, but either way, the piranha are there, they're hungry, and given the hundreds of empty-headed co-eds who've shown up for the lakeside party, there are now far fewer bathing suits to nibble through. Among our heroes are a blandly pleasant teen (Steven R. McQueen), his blandly pleasant mom (Elisabeth Shue), his blandly pleasant high-school crush (Jessica Szohr), and his insufferably obnoxious younger siblings (names purposely withheld). And given the movie's Z-grade dialogue, embarrassingly gratuitous T&A, and overall atrocious acting - Jerry O'Connell, as the horn-dog video director, gives the least appealing performance of his career, if you can imagine - you spend most of

*Piranha 3D*

praying for the fish to just get it over with already and lay waste to everyone on-screen.

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Well, roughly an hour into the movie, it damned near happens, and for horror fans, it proves well worth the wait; the piranhas' attack on practically the entire cast (and all of the body-fat-less extras) might be the single goriest sequence I've ever viewed at the cineplex, and one of the most grossly entertaining. The frustratingly murky underwater photography makes it tough to see the fish really going to town, but the blood and entrails splatter with delirious glee, and Aja stages a series of *accidental* deaths - including that of a young woman who gets sawed in half - in ways that I might never forget. (I *definitely* won't forget the execution of the girl whose hair gets tangled in a speedboat motor, and whose face is literally ripped off her head.)

### *Piranha 3D*

is mostly terrible, and not in a so-terrible-it's-actually-pretty-awesome way, either. Yet I'll admit to loving this aquatic massacre more than I can say, and I actually loved two of its actors nearly as much: the hysterically over-the-top Christopher Lloyd, who earns his paycheck and *then*

some, and Richard Dreyfuss, whose introduction finds him in a rickety boat singing "Show Me the Way to Go Home," and whose name is eventually revealed to be Matt. (As in Hooper?) I'm hoping that when Spielberg saw this movie, he wept with happiness.



### **CLARY ILLIAN: A YEAR IN THE LIFE**

Area filmmaker Atom Burke will be screening his new documentary *Clary Illian: A Year in the Life* at Davenport's Figge

Art Museum on August 27, and my only major complaint with the movie lies with its title. Isn't "*A Year in the Life*

" a rather grand subheader for a work that's only 24 minutes long?

Director/co-writer/co-producer/editor Burke's endeavor is basically a cinematic getting-to-know-you with longtime pottery artisan (and author of *A Potter's Workbook*

) Clary Illian - born in Sioux City, raised in Cedar Rapids, and currently living and working in Ely, Iowa - and if you're wondering how much of a year in her life can be squeezed into 24 minutes, the answer is: obviously, not all that much. The low-voiced, charmingly matter-of-fact Illian talks a bit about pottery, and about the 2008 tumble that caused her to break a wrist and re-learn her process, and how art students today are more concerned with financial considerations than she ever was; her conversation is genial, but not all that enlightening, and the doc is rather lacking in narrative drive. (Its most dramatic moment finds narrator Saffron Henke informing us that, in 2009, Illian sold the Ely shop she had worked in for 24 years ... relocating to another shop two

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blocks north.) Still,

*Clary Illian: A Year in the Life*

is a sweet, loving introduction to a talented artist whose works are really quite something - the vessels, pitchers, coffee mugs, and such that we're shown are bursting with vibrant color and playful designs - and Burke delivers a nice extended commercial for the artist's product. Ideally, the movie should run, once per hour, for potential buyers in Illian's Ely studio, but pottery aficionados needn't wait until then to get a fine sense of her artistic gifts.

*For more information on the screening, contact the Figge Art Museum at (563)326-7804.*



### ***FROM THE BADLANDS TO ALCATRAZ***

Another recent documentary makes a local(-ish) debut this upcoming weekend, as writer/director Nancy Iverson's *From the Badlands to Alcatraz* enjoys screenings at Iowa City's Landlocked Film Festival on August 27 and 28. Running just under an hour, this friendly, moving, incredibly informative film follows members of South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation as they attempt a demanding and dangerous swim from the former prison to the San Francisco Bay, an annual rite that finds its participants contending with freezing waters, the threat of sharks, and not much in the way of aquatic expertise. (It's revealed that one middle-aged tribe member had never before been fully submerged until the six-day training period prior to the swim.) Your first, logical question is likely to be "Why would anyone do

such a thing?", and when initially asked, the Native Americans interviewed here respond with vague generalities about it being a challenge and a family tradition and such. But as the film probes deeper, the swim is revealed to be just a small part of a much larger attempt to better the lives of the Pine Ridge people, who live in the poorest county in the United States - one with an 85- to 90-percent unemployment rate - and whose collective life expectancy is 20 years below the national average. (Their reservation has one grocery store and 11 convenience stores, and children are routinely raised on diets of soda and salty and sugary snacks.) A beautifully shot, truly inspirational work,

*From the Badlands to Alcatraz*

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shines welcome light on a sadly under-reported American story, and Iverson - the pediatrician who initiated the annual endurance test - is to be applauded not only for her humanitarianism, but for her effortless brio behind the camera; the film is swift, smart, and sane. As for Iverson's interview subjects, they're unaffectedly touching and terrifically entertaining, never more so than when one young Native American named Alkapoane - pronounced like the gangster - reveals that after visiting his first farmer's market in San Francisco, his favorite meal would now consist of a delicious entrée combining beans, cheese, and bread, "with a Pepsi on the side. And some candy." Well, baby steps are still steps.

*For more information on the Iowa City screenings, visit [LandlockedFilmFestival.org](http://LandlockedFilmFestival.org) .*

*For reviews of The Switch, Eat Pray Love, and Nanny McPhee Returns, see "[Gone to Seed](#) ."*