

Whole Truth Becomes a Modern-Era Reality in ‘Catfish’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on September 24, 2010 - 7:05pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Catfish” is a real oddball of a film, set in the Twilight Zone of our own virtual cyberspace. Three twentysomething men navigate through the mysterious rigors of a journey they never expected to take. Nev Schulman is the main subject and directors Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost provide the video exposition in this true story.

Nev Schulman, a New York City photographer, receives a package one day containing a remarkable painting of a photo he took of dancers. What makes it remarkable is that it was painted by an eight year old prodigy in Michigan, who has gained notoriety with her artwork in the small town. Nev’s response is curious and touching. He wants to get to know the young artist, and it turns out she has a mother who manages her situation, and also an older half sister.

As the paintings begin to multiply and come in at a rapid rate, Nev and his videographer partners, brother Ariel and Henry Joost, begin to do a documentary about these idiosyncratic artworks. The first contact with family is duly noted, and invitations from the various family members to join up as Facebook friends becomes the standard operating procedure. Nev begins to be particularly interested in half-sister Megan, a singer/songwriter who begins a long distance correspondence via texting and Facebook.

The situation becomes hot and heavy, and Nev expresses some true feelings about Megan in the prose of our modern times, the instant messaging system on his iPhone. When the team is assigned to a documentary shoot in Vail, Colorado, the opportunity to visit Michigan, meet the eight-year old artist and feed Nev’s infatuation proves too tempting to pass up. But some logic cracks in the way Megan handles the situation begin to show, and suddenly a mystery emerges.



On the Road with Ariel Schulman, Henry Joost (backseat) and Nev Schulman in ‘Catfish’
Photo Credit: © Universal Pictures

The rest of the journey is the gang's discovery of who Megan is and how it impacts Nev and the lives of her family members. The kicker is that everything in the story is true, and unfolds in a way that fiction would never believe.

This is exposure to the nth degree, with Nev virtually living with a constant camera in his face the whole time of the journey. As a image manipulator himself, he doesn't blink as the digital eye catches him in extremely awkward moments in association with his infatuation with Megan. There is a real vulnerability and celebration in this at the same time. It is interesting to be the voyeur to the love that is blossoming and also watch Nev geek out over the impending coupling.

Directors Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost are relentless reporters. Several times Nev complains to his brother that the camera is too intrusive, and there is a telling argument in Vail from a tired subject, complaining that although he agreed to have this situation documented, the relentlessness of the constant shooting is wearing on his soul. In an age where most people have gotten somewhat comfortable when the video camera arrives, Nev represents all of humanity when he says 'enough.'

But the directors have their story in mind, and they use all the tricks of the trade to capture it. This is a fascinating document of our current age, as multiple mini cameras spew footage from all angles. Computer screens, mobile phone voice taps and close-up of text messages become the modern equivalent of peeking into somebody's window, in this case it's Nev and Megan's relationship. Some of the angles are outrageous, speaking to the modern ability of being able to have equipment that doesn't burden a shot and produces a clear digital image.

The interest also keeps building on Nev's trip. He is willing to go the extra mile most times, even consenting to read some "sex texting" between he and Megan. This becomes an amazing self-confession: How many people are willing to put their fantasies out there for all to absorb. Nev's ability to let that flow is part of the reason this film is special.



Digi-World: Photoshopped Image of Nev and Megan in 'Catfish'
Photo Credit: © Universal Pictures

The story behind Megan is also a Facebook saga. Her "friendship" with Nev on the ubiquitous electronic town hall provides a visual and audio connection unique to this generation of cyber citizens. When she sends songs and new pictures of herself, with her other "friends" around her, she and Nev build a reality that deepens their feelings toward each other much quicker than the old fashioned method.

With the whole truth of this wild ride documentary, there is a discovery that all is not what it seems in the cyberworld, but sometimes it is necessary to stick with the certain something that could offer a key to a heart-satisfying conclusion. Nev Schulman, Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost took the plunge, and the water allowed them to swim with the Catfish.

"Catfish" continues a limited release in Chicago on September 24th, check local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Nev Schulman, Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost, directed by Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman. Rated "PG-13." [Click here for the HollywoodChicago interviews of Nev Schulman, Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost of 'Catfish.'](#) [14]



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