

LIFE OF PI

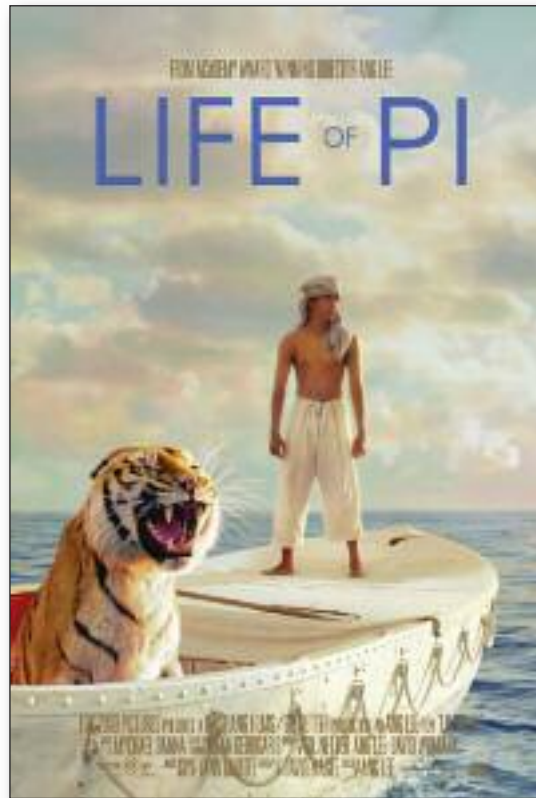
**A Fox 2000 Pictures Presentation. A Haishang Films / Gil Netter Production.
A Film by Ang Lee**

Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser

From the multi award-winning director and film maker Ang Lee (*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Brokeback Mountain, Sense and Sensibility*) comes a magical and epic film about the tragic and extraordinary life of Pi Patel. Pi was given the names 'Piscine Molitor' by his respected uncle whom he referred to as Mamaji, a famous Indian swimmer, who named him after the famed art deco swimming pool complex next to the Bois de Boulogne Park in Paris. The Piscine Molitor swimming pool was built in the late 1920's and opened by amongst others the famous Johnny Weissmuller. This pool was also where Louis Réard introduced and popularised the bikini. Now sadly closed and vandalised by graffiti artists and the like, the Piscine Molitor remains a landmark historical monument in Paris.

Pi's life changes dramatically when his whole family is wiped out after the ship that they were travelling on to Canada sank near the Marianas Trench in the western Pacific Ocean. Pi (played by Suraj Sharma) is the sole survivor of the horrible stormy night at sea along with a hyena, a zebra, an orang-utan and a rather vicious Bengal tiger oddly nicknamed 'Richard Parker'.

The film opens with a local novelist (played by Rafe Spall) visiting the adult Pi (played by Irrfan Khan) in Montreal, Canada, to obtain his life story. Pi is a famous Indian story teller and he begins to tell the novelist about his extraordinary childhood in Pondicherry, India. He gives the novelist an explanation of how he came to be called Pi, a shortened version of the names Piscine Molitor that he was punished with. His struggles as a child at school with the name Piscine (pronounced *Pis-seen*) that he was given was also portrayed and told to the novelist by the adult Pi, in addition to how he outwitted his teachers and peers to get them to call him 'Pi' instead of his crude sounding full first name. Pi is portrayed as a highly intellectual and bright young boy with interests in several different religions of the world, to the irritation of his parents, especially his father, Santosh (played by Adil Hussain). Pi's father, a scientific and pragmatic individual, was the local zoo keeper and part owner thereof in Pondicherry, and the family owned a number of exotic animals in their zoo. One day Santosh informs his family that the Pondicherry municipality will no longer be subsidising the zoo and as a result the family had to sell their beloved menagerie.



With the animals destined for overseas clients, the Patel family boards a Japanese cargo vessel bound for Canada where the Patel family hopes to make a new life for themselves following the loss of the zoo. A heavy storm ensues one night whilst travelling to Canada and the ship sinks. Pi and the Bengal tiger Richard Parker becomes castaways at sea with no hope of being rescued. A magical and adventurous journey starts for both Pi and the tiger, and both need to learn to live together on a small lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. As mentioned earlier, a hyena, a zebra and an orang-utan also survived the sinking ship, although needless to say that confined along with a Bengal tiger on a small wooden lifeboat, the former three animals do not survive. Their demise I must say was one of the least entertaining parts of the film and I found it rather disturbing putting it mildly, although I can

understand the inclusion thereof by the director to amplify the desperation and heartache of the young Pi who was lost at sea.

Based on Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi*, the film version is an absolute gem in terms of visual presentation and effects. It is simply spectacularly done! The film won no less than four Oscars at this year's Academy Awards, and they were all well deserved. In addition to the movie's visual brilliance I found the story of Pi and his experiences a quite moving one, not to say sitting on the edge of my seat at times due to the sea-bound antics of the Bengal tiger Richard Parker. The film version portrays a truly unique story and it gives the viewer a lot of fascinating 'moments', both in terms of the story content and the visual effects created for the unfolding storyline. The film *Life of Pi* is also filled with humour, albeit that it is tragic humour at times and one's heart goes out to the young Pi who is faced with the life and death struggle out on the vast Pacific Ocean. In addition a number of important life-lessons are also contained in the story and experiences of Pi. This is one of the must-see films of the year and I do hope that it is high up on your priority viewing list if you have not done so already. Director and filmmaker Ang Lee has a singularly unique gift for cinematography and the bringing to life of adapted screenplays and storylines for the big screen, stories that often contains heart braking emotional content although he masters the art of presenting it in a manner that does not leave the viewer exasperated and drained. Again, well done Mr. Lee!