

HER FAMILY / HIS

Reviewing Family Entertainment



HERS

HIS

Summer is finally here and with the equinox comes the eternal question of parenthood: "What do we do with the kids now that school is out?" To kick off the summer, our family chose three unique experiences that challenged all of us to think, learn, and laugh!

Shrek, the animated feature film from DreamWorks, has become a staple in our film repertory. What could be better than "the ugly guys" being cast as the Leading Lady and the Prince Charming? But could *Shrek 2* live up to our expectations? After all, *Shrek* won an Academy Award™! The answer turned out to be simple: Yes.

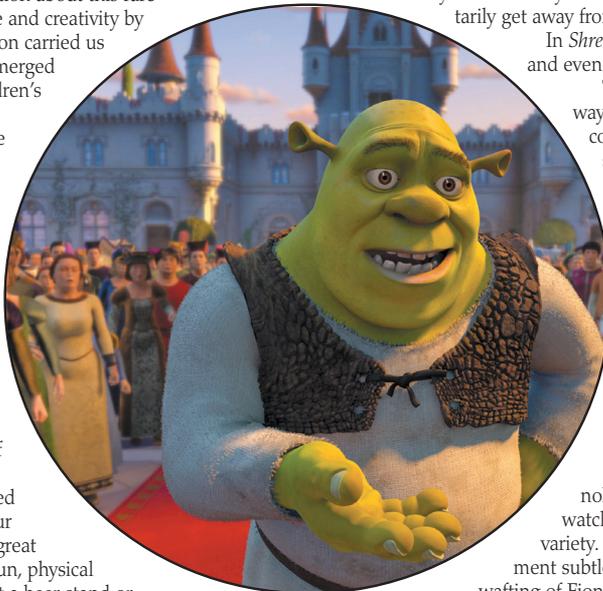
Again, the story takes a unique path with a dreamy-eyed cat as a bandit and a Fairy Godmother who makes the Valkyries look like welcomed guests. In a reversal of fortunes, the Donkey becomes a stallion, the Gingerbread Boy becomes a giant, and the King becomes a frog! Can it get any better? The exposition of the story unwinds a little slowly, but once Puss In Boots makes an entrance the action is rapid-fire, leading to an explosive fiesta finale that leaves the audience singing and laughing their way out of the theater. *Shrek 2* is a good investment of summer family time and money.

For a change of pace, we loaded the SUV and drove to the Irvine Spectrum to see *Sacred Planet* on the giant IMAX screen. *Sacred Planet* is a remarkable cinematic journey to the world's most remote indigenous people. The film beautifully documents family life in the most isolated regions of the world.

We left the theater and headed for a Ben and Jerry's ice cream. We ordered root beer floats to fuel an hour of conversation about this rare footage captured with remarkable care and creativity by a visionary film group. The conversation carried us through the drive home. Two truths emerged from this filmmaking: family and children's laughter. It is amazing that living as a family in a Los Angeles suburb, I share those truths with a family in a remote jungle of Borneo. It really is a small world after all.

The summer is full of interesting festivals. Ranking among these is the largest Water Festival in the country, right here in Southern California! For the last seven years, the Orange County Water District has mounted the Children's Water Education Festival. More than 7000 children learn about water, for sure the most fascinating and vulnerable of the planet's sustainable resources.

The theme this year encapsulated the mission, "Protect and Conserve Our World, Our Water." This was another great investment of family time, providing fun, physical activity, learning, and laughter without a beer stand or loud music. Here in Southern California, water is critical to our very survival. We should all be thankful that we have the largest water festival in our own backyard. As a footnote, the sponsor of this festival was perhaps the biggest surprise- the Environmental Group of the Disneyland Resort. Even in the Magic Kingdom, water is King! Bravo to Disney for caring about our natural resources.



Both having prestigious degrees in Theater and having studied in Oxford and Paris respectively, Suzanne and Chris Shoemaker have worked as freelance artists and writers in England, Canada, France, China and Hawaii. They now call Los Angeles their home where they live with their three sons and two grandsons. They can be reached at suzanne@actsofcreation.com or chris2@actsofcreation.com.

Sacred Planet: At some time or other, we all want to get away from our everyday pressures, problems, and routines. We yearn to reach out beyond our limited perceptions and understanding to experience something that makes us feel more alive, more connected to this phenomenal planet we live on.

Walt Disney Pictures' *Sacred Planet*, directed by Jon Long, provides such a transcendental journey from the ordinary and reminds us just how beautiful Earth and the creatures that inhabit it are.

Perfectly narrated by Oscar®-winning actor, director, producer, and noted environmentalist Robert Redford, the film invites us on a global travelogue, highlighting culturally indigenous people in hard-to-reach locations. Nothing about *Sacred Planet* is preachy or pedantic. Rather than forcing a thematic conclusion upon the audience by quoting disastrous environmental statistics or doom and gloom prophesies about Mother Nature's demise, this film is an exuberant celebration of Earth's pristine and unspoiled landscapes.

The film's title is derived from the reverential respect the First Americans showed our Mother Earth. It shares their belief that every animal, plant, insect and inanimate object is our Earthly brethren. This 45-minute film highlights outrageous natural beauty in places such as Utah, Arizona, California, Namibia, Borneo, Thailand, New Zealand, British Columbia, and Alaska.

The film is so upbeat and positive I found myself smiling throughout the screening while my cynical side muttered, "Well, see? We haven't ruined these places yet!" Rush to your nearest IMAX theater to see *Sacred Planet* – you'll momentarily get away from it all and your soul will be glad you did!

In *Shrek 2*, the lovable Ogre's story just gets more believable, funnier, and even a bit more lovable.

The creative team behind *Shrek* realized that the one sure way to maintain our interest in the *Shrek* franchise and keep us coming back for more would be to reveal a deeper emotional side of the characters. At the beginning of *Shrek 2*, the courting is covered, the honeymoon has happened, and Fiona and Shrek have started to develop a married couple's shorthand for communication. To us married folk, this is very familiar territory.

Amplifying the tongue-in-cheek humor that anchored *Shrek*, *Shrek 2* confidently takes its time to build toward its laugh-a-minute pace that had the entire audience in stitches.

Puss In Boots, the newly introduced feline assassin voiced by Antonio Banderas nearly steals the show. A hilarious hairball scene ranks right up there as one of the all-time funniest animation scenes.

Since the first *Shrek*, the computer software and technological advances sometimes leave you wondering if you're watching real-live characters instead of the computer-generated variety. The animation is that good. Watch for the realistic movement subtleties such as the field grass waving in the breeze or the gentle wafting of Fiona's eyelash. The gestures are incredibly lifelike. An entire animation team spent millions of hours perfecting these little details that for the most part should go unnoticed – the artistry is indeed a marvel to behold.

Shrek 2 received the MPAA PG rating and, except for some light-hearted moments featuring flatulence, there are no concerning content issues to keep the young ones from attending this fun animated flick. Just like the first *Shrek*, *Shrek 2* reminds us to be true to ourselves and celebrate our uniqueness. We all can't live within the Vanity Fair pages, and most of us probably wouldn't want to anyway.

Warning! – Don't be too quick to leave the theater before the end of the credit roll. There is a Donkey's surprise in store for those who are patient.

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