

# HER FAMILY / HIS™

## Reviewing Family Entertainment



### HERS

The summer film releases predictably lure audiences into air-conditioned theaters where they flee the blistering sun, shovel popcorn and mentally escape into larger-than-life, expensive studio moneymakers. Amazing in this sea of action heroes, teenage rage and science fiction, two independently produced family films are challenging the giants and demanding to be heard.

*Two Brothers* is the sensitively crafted and beautifully filmed story of Kumal and Sangha's (twin tigers) journey from a Southeast Asian jungle in the early 20th century, to the hurly-burly world of colonial occupation and back to their home to claim their rightful title to the throne of this natural paradise.

Jean-Jacques Annaud has traditionally enriched his films with social history and cultural sensitivity. His filmography includes *Seven Years in Tibet*, *The Name of the Rose* and *Wings of Courage*. *Two Brothers* follows in the footsteps of Jean-Jacques Annaud's earlier work with a rich setting, both in the jungle and the colonial town, and in its respectful detailing of the historically rich culture and people of Southeast Asia.

The protagonists of the film are the tigers themselves, whose Shakespearian journey takes them from bliss to chaos to bliss again. Their human counterparts are sensitively played by Guy Pearce as Aidan McRory and the young Freddie Highmore (*Neverland*) as Raoul. This unlikely pair are brought together by the tigers and transformed into kindred spirits. Despite their age difference, Raoul's "Old-Soul" childhood awakens the humanity in Aidan and the two conspire to release the tigers back to their native home.

This is not just another animal story. It is a beautiful film that takes you on a journey back in time to a place that exists somewhere between myth and reality and appeals to the humanity in all of us.

Frank Coaraci brings a similar filmmaking vision to his production of *Around the World in 80 Days*. Trusting the audience's sense of taste, he takes us on a true journey around the world dipping into real street scenes in India and China full of cultural richness and diversity. His storytelling celebrates the fantasy and humor of cross-cultural encounters. As in the original version, the plot provides a vehicle for a wonderful summer vacation and the audience is invited to travel along.

On a personal note, I saw the first version of this film as a young girl growing up in Spain and never forgot the brilliance of Mexico's great clown, Cantinflas. My one reservation in seeing this new version of the original classic was Jackie Chan's ability to rise to the level of the original Passepartout. To my delight, I left the film respectfully acknowledging the comic mastery of this contemporary clown. Jackie is good at Martial Arts but better at clowning - I am sure in his Chinese homeland he is a brilliant Monkey-King!

So amidst the massive marketing blitz of the summer blockbusters, there are two independent films that will soften your heart and tickle your funny bone and make you glad you came out of the sun and into the theater. As a side note, my fourteen year old, "oh-so-cool" son loved both of these films and it was a verbal tug-of-war to get him into the theater! So have courage: the catalogue of good family films has just increased by two and the word "Family" has stretched to include the teens.

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### HIS

*Two Brothers*, the title of Universal's summer family film sounds like it'd be a gritty, urban, slice-of-life thriller of a story about two human blood brothers gone bad to the bone. The story does indeed center on a brotherly relationship: but one of a striped, four-legged kind.

The story opens in the lap of an exotic jungle in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, deep in Southeast Asia near the remains of an ancient temple. Along with their parents named Tigress and Great Tiger, Kumal and Sangha, two young tigers, rule this jungle kingdom. Conflict arises when Aidan McRory (Guy Pearce), a famous big game hunter/author decides to collect and sell antiquated artifacts to wealthy patrons by raiding exotic temples. In the process, he unintentionally invades the Tiger family's home that changes the brothers' lives forever.

Directed and co-written by the extremely talented Jean-Jacques Annaud, the film demonstrates Annaud's deep and empathetic passion for animals as articulate and profound storytellers in their own right. He possesses an uncanny knack for allowing us to realistically enter the animals' minds and understand their motivations.

There are some special moments in the film that border on pure delight. Not giving a thing away, the stuffed tiger on the toy shelf scene produced a huge laugh from our attentive audience. You'll experience a double take before you'll know what hit you.

*Two Brothers* is fast paced, full of emotion and wild animals you'll love from afar yet keep close to your heart long after the tiger's last roar.

Don't think a second about leaving the young ones home for this fine summer film - it's a heartfelt story you won't want them to miss.

No less exotic or less traveled, *Around The World in 80 Days* is a rip-roaring and raucous type of trip-tick farce. According to executive producer Phyllis Alia, "*Around The World in 80 Days* is an adventure, comedy, love story, martial arts film, fantasy - and did I say adventure? - all rolled into one." She's not kidding, either.

What this summer film accomplishes where so many others fail is that you find yourself rooting for and caring about its main characters from the film's action packed opening to its predictable yet satisfying ending. Like the outcome of any successful party, who cares if we know how it ends as long as we have a blast getting there?

The film succeeds from its get-go because of its exceptionally talented international cast. As the eccentric and whacky inventor Phileas Fogg, Steve Coogan exudes a special brand of nerdy charm all his own. On the brink of being ostracized by London's Royal Academy of Science, he is challenged by its manipulative and power hungry leader to circumnavigate the globe in exactly 80 days or promise to never invent again! Yearning to be taken as a serious inventor, he hastily takes the bet!

Passepartout, his ultimately trusty, initially self-serving valet (played by the endearing and super gifted Jackie Chan) steals this show. Not only does he provide some extremely inventive martial arts action sequences, but also his English diction, verbal timing and emotive inflections have noticeably improved.

This film boasts incredible locations, foreign cultures, wonderful pacing, outrageous character actors and a funky cameo by none other than Governor Schwarzenegger as a narcissistic Turkish prince. This film is what I think summer family films are all about - loads of fun, high adrenaline and laughs. Enter your Cineplex, scrunch down low in your cushy seat and enjoy the thrill of being thoroughly entertained.

