

A Smurfin' Good Time

I was so pleasantly surprised by how much my family liked the new Smurf movie that I was inspired to write a short review. Going in, I thought I would hate the movie because it didn't look funny. And I was a fan of the Smurfs as a kid, so not only did the movie look stupid, but I couldn't figure out why it took place in our realm rather than the Smurf's realm – wouldn't fans of the little blue mystical creatures, kids, and everyone else want to see Smurf village on the big screen?

Don't worry, we get to see Smurf village, and it's pretty cool. Especially the scene where Gargamel breaks in!! Ok, so I guess that's kind of a spoiler, sorry about that... but this is a kid's movie we're talking about. And kid's movie it is – my kids all really liked it (ages 11, 7, 4 and 3). The Smurfs have screen time for pretty much 100% of the movie, and there aren't any boring scenes with a lot of dialogue – these tend to lose the attention of kids. There are some Smurfy jokes – in this case I'm using "Smurfy" to describe inside jokes written for fans of the Smurfs from decades ago. Much like the Brady Bunch movies are actually enjoyable parodies of the hit tv show and poke fun at it, The Smurfs movie has gags about such shout-outs to the 80s cartoon as their names reflecting their personalities (a hilarious joke in the movie that I'm still chuckling about), cracks about how Smurfette always wears the same dress (although more than one joke about this was overdoing it and took the humor away), and multiple references to creator Peyo.



(the Smurfs as I knew and loved them)

From the previews, I thought Gargamel was going to be a bumbling bafoon, one of these over-the-top characters who might be ruined by the actor portraying him as he flailed around aimlessly in a ridiculous looking costume. But Gargamel as a live person in today's New York City was actually quite entertaining and even hilarious at times (If you grew up watching the Smurf cartoon like I did, watch for the way Hank Azaria runs as he portrays Gargamel – he imitates the cartoon character so well that it made me laugh out loud!). I especially liked the inclusion of the little details from the cartoon – like seeing the Smurf cages that Gargamel always had lying in wait for when he finally caught the little guys. There was backstory explained; everyone knows by now that Smurfette was actually created by Gargamel as Smurf bait, right? The story line was cheesy but not unbearable even while it made several futile attempts at teaching positive life lessons to kids in the audience. I could have done without the Katy Perry song reference (is “I Kissed a Girl really a song for kids? I’ve never heard the song and don’t want to know), and Katy Perry as Smurfette’s voice didn’t really give any personality to the character anyhow – she was just a girl Smurf and nothing like her character in the cartoon. Clumsy Smurf on the other hand, was a perfect 3d replica of his cartoon counterpart – both in voice and graphics. I did stop watching the Smurfs sometime after the Smurf cousins (Smurflings) came in, so I have no

idea where Gutsy Smurf came from (seems to be a brave Scottish Smurf complete with red sideburns and a kilt?). I would have liked to see my personal favorite Smurf, Jokey, get more screen time in the movie. On that subject, I don't understand why the group of 6 Smurfs with the most screen time (the ones who get to go to NY) did not include such series regulars as Jokey, Greedy, Handy, Vanity or Hefty. Actually, I didn't see those Smurfs at all, but then again, we arrived late to the movie so maybe I missed their appearances. The production staff also did an excellent job of utilizing aspects of modern technology to make funny jokes involving the Smurfs. Case in point: see the wikipedia reference.



(My favorite Smurf, Jokey)

Overall, Smurfs was an entertaining film for the entire family – and there was a huge gap between my low expectations and my high level of enjoyment of this cute movie! A must-see for anyone who has kids to take to a movie – bonus if you are a Smurf fan!

One more note – here is a list of characters I would like to see in the sequel:

Hogatha, Johan and Peewit, Clockwork Smurf, and Baby Smurf. But please, NO SMURFLINGS!!

And oh yeah... I did a search on my own blog to see if I had written about the I'm a Pink Toothbrush song from the Smurf's 1979 album. Turns out, I did include it in a [blog post that I had written in March 2010](#), and my kids (and me still!) are big fans of this adorable tune. It was really fun to read about my speculations on the Smurf movie in this blog post given the limited info I had that time on this "in production" project! (if you read it, you should know that Quentin Tarentino was

originally cast as Brainy Smurf, but both actor and studio are quiet on why the pairing did not work out...) So apparently I HAD heard of Gutsy Smurf – and wrote about it in my own blog a year and a half ago!



(modern Smurfs from the 2011 movie)

Cincinnati Kids

When I wrote about our trip to King's Island (an amusement park near Cincinnati Ohio) a few blog posts ago, I mentioned how I have the behind-the-scenes Brady Bunch book written by the actor who played Greg Brady on the show, Barry Williams. A few nights ago, I looked up the episode in the book where the Bradys visit King's Island, and I read the synopsis (including the part about how the Bradys almost didn't make it off The Racer roller coaster alive! If you watch the episode, look for their terrified faces as they pulled into the station – that was not acting!) and dug up clips of the episode on youtube.com

If you've been to King's Island recently or in the past 10 or 20 years, then you will see how much the park has changed since this episode was filmed – enjoy!

VIP Squared

Every year, my husband and I are very lucky to get a week-long break from being busy parents of 4 kids when Grandma takes the kids to her house for a week. For the past two years during this vacation, we traveled downstate to King's Island, an amusement park near Cincinnati. King's Island offers a VIP Tour, which means that for 9 hours, you get your own personal park employee to lead you around the park and to the **front of all the park rides of your choosing**, even holding your stuff if you really want him to! In case you're interested, a VIP Tour at King's Island also includes an all-you-can-eat lunch buffet, unlimited fountain drinks all day, a ride photo, an ice cream cone, a behind-the-scenes tour of The Beast, and \$25 in park souvenir money – which can be spent on carnival style games, buying more food (if you need it after the buffet!), or in the park's gift shops. While it may seem expensive up front, if you do the math, the VIP Tour ends up being a great deal all things considered, and we highly recommend it; especially if you're a coaster enthusiast!

Being able to walk to the front of any ride line of one's choosing is really cool – it's hard to imagine, until you ride coaster after coaster without pause!

We began our day on The Beast (only because the Diamondback was not functioning, but luckily our fears of it being broken for the entire day were dispelled and they were able to fix it before long). The Beast is an almost 5-minute long journey into the desolate forests of southern Ohio on a wooden roller coaster! As we learned from our behind the scenes tour (included with the VIP Tour as I said), prior to its unveiling in 1979, The Beast was built on-site and follows closely the terrain upon which it is built. It was not pre-ordered and

shipped to the park in segments like many modern roller coasters.



The Beast follows
its native land's
terrain and
disappears into a
tunnel at the
bottom of its
first drop

After riding The Beast twice in a row (almost 10 minutes worth of roller coasters right there!!), we moved on to the Vortex, an old-school steel roller coaster with more than a few high speed inversions. I had printed out my blog post I had written about the VIP Tour a year before, and it served as a helpful guide for this year. And I have to say, everything was much more enjoyable this year – last year I had written in my blog that I didn't like the Vortex much and that the Backlot Stunt Coaster was lame, but this year both rides were much more fun than I had remembered – perhaps because I knew what to expect from the park, and so the element of surprise was minimized. I'm a person who likes to know what to expect rather than to be completely taken by surprise – I have 4 little kids, so I have enough surprises throughout my average day, thank you ☐

But whatever the case, whichever the reason, this year's VIP

Tour was even more fun than last year's! All of the rides we rode were better than I had remembered they were, and the Whitewater Canyon water ride was even more fun when riding with friends! Of course, I think it helped that this year's temperature was almost 90° instead of the unseasonal 70° we had during last year's tour – getting soaked last year left us near frozen! And I learned a little bit from last year's tour – no blisters from walking around in wet shoes for me! I brought a little bag and put a change of shoes in it. As much as it may have annoyed my co-VIPs (but then again, I was the only gal in a group of men), I changed into my flip-flops every time we got on a water ride. Not only did I save my feet from blistering, but I got to order our guide to carry my shoes around the park! Ok, so I actually felt pretty badly making the poor guy carry my shoes around, but it was kind of like being a queen for a day, and – carrying our stuff **was** his job after all...



The Diamondback
Roller Coaster

Being led around the park by a guide all day, slipping in front of the 'regular guests' to get to the front of the lines (and picking whatever spot you choose on all the rides! Note to self for next year: front car on The Beast rocks, back row on the Diamondback is sweet, and the back is ideal and technically the front for Firehawk...) gave us plenty of time for 'extras' in the park: things we don't normally do in theme parks, usually for lack of time like souvenir shopping,

playing games and seeing shows. The show we chose to see this year – and it's strange, I know, that I keep promising myself a theater break but still I continue to find myself in a theater audience – was called 'Too Much TV', and it was actually pretty fun! It began with a 'host' who went around the audience asking for them to 'name that tune' as different tv show theme songs were played. I thought I would be good at this kind of thing, but apparently my brain had been scrambled upon one (ok, a dozen) too many roller coasters earlier in the day because I couldn't get any of the answers correct. But it's ok, I didn't raise my hand too high- unlike a fellow VIP who was called upon, but he answered correctly and won himself a Too Much TV button – way to go! Despite a fleeting regret in the beginning of the show (am I really watching yet another stage show?!?), I did enjoy myself. I recognized 100% of the show titles and about 80% of the lyrics since I used to be a huge tv fan and had watched many of the shows when I was a kid (many in reruns; I'm not THAT old!) The show included 6 dancer-singers, and it began with TV shows from the 50's – 60's (a few of these I watched like Patty Duke and Mary Tyler Moore – um, in reruns of course ☐ while the rest I just knew the themes since they were very famous like the Andy Griffith Show) and continued to shows from the 70s (3's Company, Brady Bunch, Partridge Family, etc), 80's-90's (Full House, Perfect Strangers, Growing Pains, Friends, etc). LOTS of fun, especially for a former TV junkie like myself. The singers / dancers were pretty good, and I have to say that one of the highlights of the show was that during the Brady Bunch theme, they showed clips from the episode where the Brady's actually visit King's Island!! I had totally forgotten that episode (I used to be a huge Brady Bunch fan; I watched it every day in syndication after school, and I had the book / episode guide written by Mr. Greg Brady (Barry Williams) himself – I used to check off the episodes I had seen – ahem, NERD!!), but anyway, I will have to dig it up on youtube.com or somewhere and watch it again now!!

Miraculously, the rain held off until minutes after our guide was dismissed for the day – we had been watching the storms move in all day the day before our tour, hoping it wouldn't affect our trip. We had promised our guide an email depicting our thoughts on what riding The Beast was like in the dark, but as I said, it began to rain, and we were forced to take a break. That's when we realized just how tired we really were – too tired to wait for the rain to stop and the rides to re-open, so we'll have to experience The Beast at night next year. And I could not be looking forward to it more!!

On the way home, we found a White Castle (don't have them way up here in the bufu northwestern corner of Ohio), or at least that's what the sign said. But the White Castle location was connected to a gas station, and the sliders did not taste quite the same... I thought they were just old until I brought some home and re-heated them, and they STILL were a bit off... hmmm.... Normally these things reheat really well, and I'm sorry to tell the White Castle newbie in our group that he still hasn't really tried an authentic slider. They hit the spot at the time and had we taken the time to stop anywhere else, we would have gotten home even later than the 1 am-ish that we did and would have been even more exhausted. My bodily soreness from being beat up by various coasters all day was less than last year, but it also lasted a day or two longer than I remember. Oh well, more to tweak for next year! Maybe I will bring TWO pairs of shoes for Mr. Guide to carry around for me, haha!

And one final note... We have a running joke with a member of our group – we went to Disney World with him almost two years ago, and it seemed that every ride which he rode stalled; including rides that didn't usually stall. At King's Island, only one ride stalled while we were on it, but we got stuck in what I am sure is the most precarious position in which a person can get stuck at that park – flat on our backs, under the great blue sky on the Firehawk. Here is a picture of how

we were stuck; note that these people are in the station, which would have been better since there were people around to help. We were stuck flat on our backs *outside* of the station for about 10-15 minutes, and I couldn't help but notice how sympathetic the ride operator seemed during her announcements directing us to stay calm.



Also noticeable were the extremely red faces and disoriented nature of our fellow riders who were finally returned to an upright position and allowed to leave the ride with us. For the record, our park guide happened to be on the Firehawk with us (on the VIP Tour, you can also make your guide go on rides!) and said that he had never seen it stuck like that before. So yeah, while we were only stuck on a ride once during our day, what a place to be stuck!!!

And surely I don't want to leave you with a bad impression of the Firehawk, nor of King's Island, so here are some fun youtube videos from other riders:

Firehawk (you lie on your back and then are flipped after the lift onto your stomach. Like Superman, you fly thru a series of loops, inversions, and open track):

Next, not one of my favorite rides at King's Island, though still fun, the joy in Invertigo is watching the person's face who is sitting across from you. Ride with a friend sitting across from you, and experience the g-forces backwards first. Then watch your friend's face as they experience the same thing backwards you just did – It's priceless!!

And now for my favorites, The Beast (start watching at a minute and ten seconds into the video for the real action):

And the Diamondback:

All this watching the POV cams on the coasters makes me want to do it all over again... But unfortunately I have to wait... So until next year...

Defunct TV Part II

Since my first post about defunct tv was SO lengthy, I had to omit some of my favorite tv shows from yester-year which were so great they warrant a mention and another post.

[The Bozo Show](#) – If you grew up in Chicagoland, this show was an icon. Some people in Ohio have told me it was on tv here too, but I know it just wasn't the same as growing up with Bozo next door. First of all, EVERYONE you knew went to see the Bozo show live. The girl I went with was put on the waiting list when she was in utero, and we were 9 or 10 years old before her mother finally got the tickets that allowed us entry into the show. But I'm just glad I got the experience, and I'm even more glad that I was old enough to remember seeing Bozo live – it was really neat. I was really scared of a character named Wizzo though, and I hoped he wouldn't be there on the day I was... Ironically, I don't remember if he was in that episode or not. My husband went to a Bozo show taping of course, since he was also a Chicagoland kid, but neither of us were on the Grand Prize Game. There were other characters on the show, mainly Bozo's clown sidekick, Cookie, and also a puppet dog named Cuddly Duddly. I think I'm going to have to dig out the tape of the show I was on, just for memories... So was Bozo aired nationally? Since it was so hugely popular in our area, it's hard to say; it's not like there was an internet back then or like I traveled a lot or had pen pals as a kid to ask. I would guess so, since lots of people have heard of it, but I'm sure it was nothing like the

phenomena it reached in Chicagoland.

[Land of the Lost](#) – Saturday morning tv at its finest. This was a live show about a family who was transported back in time to contend with all kinds of prehistoric creatures like dinosaurs, etc. While looking up the show on imdb, I learned that there were 2 versions. One that aired from 1974-76, and one from 1991-92. I will dismiss the 90's remake since I wasn't a big fan. But as for the original, I barely remember it but I know that I LOVED it! I must have watched it in syndication however, because I was not around to see it from '74-'76. But, when I saw the photos and synopsis of the episodes, I know that's the show I watched and loved. Interesting note – they are currently make a [movie version](#) due out next year starring [Will Ferrell](#) as the dad! I am a big fan of Will Ferrell's. I think he is great in almost everything I've seen him in; he's always funny and surprisingly versatile. He stars in one of my favorite Christmas movies of all time, [Elf](#). So I am anxious to see what they do with this remake of a classic tv show for our generation. I think the movie is slated to be a comedy, but with Will Ferrell as its star, that's no surprise. I wonder if they'll do what they did with the [Brady Bunch](#) movies and make it a satire of the tv show? It was very effective and funny when they did it in the Brady Bunch movies, but it would seem difficult to pull off for many tv shows without being too over the top. With the cheesy sets and special effects and costumes of the '70's Land of the Lost, satire might be a good avenue to explore for the movie remake. It'd be cool to see the movie set in the 70's – well, the family gets sent back in time, but if the family were still from the '70's... Guess we'll just have to wait until 2009 to see!

[The Littles](#) – A catchy theme song which began, "We are the Littles..." It was an awesome Saturday morning cartoon (which of course spawned into toys, lunchboxes, books, and even a few movies) about a family of small people with pointy ears and

tails who lived within the walls of a Bigg (literally, this was the surname of the family!) family's house. The plots revolved around Tom and Lucy Little, a brother and sister who tried to keep their dopey aviator cousin Dinky out of trouble along with their Grandpa Little. The Littles had rigged up their own little world within the walls of the Bigg's home which they entered through a light socket, and it was neat to see how they used normal size objects to make things they needed. They would often enlist the help of Henry Bigg, the human regular-size kid who lived in the house, since he was the only human to know about the Littles. Cute show – I could probably find it on [youtube](#) or somewhere like that if I looked.

[Shirt Tales](#) – Adorable little animal characters who began as a line of greeting cards were turned into a cartoon. Their shirts would display different sayings to express their feelings; such as Hug Me, Cuddly, or Dig Me (worn by a mole).

A really cute cartoon which aired on the USA network as part of its Cartoon Express, of which Pac Man the cartoon was also a part; see below.

[Pac Man](#) – A cartoon based upon the popular video game. I don't remember much about it, but I know I liked it, and it didn't last long. I think if I were to see this cartoon today as an adult, it would be dumb, whereas Shirt Tales might be cute. I haven't checked youtube, but they both just might be there; it seems likely.