

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)

A College Student Could Have Done Better

Recently a fellow blogger mentioned a dorm fire at the university where his youngest daughter is to attend. While I'm sure that much was learned from that particular tragedy in order to safeguard future students, it gave me a flashback to my own college days when there was a fire in the dorm where my friends lived. That particular dorm building was 28 stories high, and I was hanging out somewhere around the 25th floor on the night when the fire alarm went off. Obviously, we couldn't use the elevators to evacuate the rather large building, so we had to use the stairwells. I remember that after descending flight after flight of stairs, the monotony of the flights started to mess with my head a little bit, and by the end, it became difficult to even move my legs in the motion to go down the stairs – maybe a testament to just one of the challenges faced by those in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001? Luckily in our case, however, the fire was not threatening to our welfare, and we all made it out of

the building safely. When we got out, we gathered around to watch the flames being extinguished – and much to our surprise, the flames were licking the part of the building where some of my best friends lived. Turns out, the fire had started in my friends' room (not where I was hanging out that particular night) and demolished it. The couch where I had crashed many a night had turned to just ash and a metal frame. I found it interesting that the firemen gave us a walk-thru of the room afterward – apparently something they do on college campuses? They taught us about the 'flashpoint', where the fire must have started and how hot it was there, and they also pointed out various objects from around the room and explained the temperatures it must have been in the room for the fire to have that effect upon that particular object, etc. – very informative! So anyway, the point of this post is **that** building – it's called Watterson Towers, and it's located at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Not the pertiest thing, ain't it?



First off, the thing is HUGE; it houses 2200 students. Illinois State University is a college campus located amongst farm fields in central Illinois – a far cry from Chicago – and Watterson Towers is the highest building between St. Louis and Chicago – a distance of nearly 300 miles. Also, the design of the structure is... well, it's bizarre – for lack of a better adjective. I think a college student could have done better at designing a building, hence the title of my blog post. It

has been rumored that the [designer of Watterson Towers committed suicide](#), but I'm not sure if this is true or not. Click on the link I supplied above to read more about this – someone asked if the designer committed suicide because he thought the towers would eventually collapse, and the person who asked the question mentions that firefighters told them that if there were a fire at Watterson, students wouldn't make it out alive – go figure since I and hundreds of others are proof that that theory didn't pan out – thank goodness! Obviously those rumors are overblown, at least some of them, cuz I can't find any info about the designer or his fate. But the bottom line is, it **is** a very strange design for a building, especially one that is to house college students. Sadly, more than a few students have jumped from the windows of Watterson over the years to escape the pressure that college students often needlessly feel.

More than a decade after residing in Watterson, it's still interesting for me to research the building and its design. It's amazing to me to remember that college kids used to get up early to stand in a line reminiscent of heavily-sought after concert tickets to get a room in Watterson. Seems like any of the other dorms on campus would have been much safer and cheaper, for that matter... But Watterson was where it was at – at least when I was in school. It was the most centrally located dorm, and it had the largest rooms by far. I can understand how space would be an issue when you are rooming with someone (or multiple people, as could be the case in Watterson's huge rooms) you might never have met. So anyway, here is the breakdown of the design of Watterson – it is almost maze-like when you're inside, and I still think a college student could do better at the design part! Just imagine Move-In day! 2200 students, all their stuff, and their parents! And remember, it's a 28-story building, but there are only FIVE elevator stops – and if your student does not reside on an "elevator floor", you must carry their stuff up or down flights of stairs to reach their rooms! To those

who are uninformed of Watterson's design, Moving Day must play out like a cruel joke!

From Wikipedia.com:

Watterson is composed of 10 houses, each considered its own residence hall. The houses are named after the first ten men to hold the office of United States Secretary of State. The entire building is divided into two towers. Each tower is divided into five houses. Each house is divided into five floors. Each floor divided into four suites, except on the third floor, which is divided into two suites for elevator access. In the North Tower, the houses, from bottom to top, are Jefferson House, Randolph House, Pickering House, Marshall House and Madison House. In the South Tower, bottom to top, the houses are Smith House, Monroe House, Adams House, Clay House, and Van Buren House. The houses are located across from each other, joined by a breezeway only on the third floor of the houses.

The building's unique design prevents it from having full elevator service. Of the 8 elevators that operate in the building, there is a maximum of nine stops, eight of which students have access to (maintenance level is for staff only): Service Level, Formal (Lobby) Level, Smith-Jefferson Breezeway, Monroe-Randolph Breezeway, Adams-Pickering Breezeway, Marshall-Clay Breezeway, Madison-Van Buren Breezeway and the Informal Level. Each breezeway level is the third floor of each house. A resident who lived on Clay 4 would stop at the Marshall-Clay Breezeway and then need to walk up one flight of stairs to reach his room.

And that's the simplest of the directions... if a student was assigned to Randolph 1, he or she would have to get off at the Monroe-Randolph elevator stop, then walk the breezeway, then descend the two flights of stairs until they got to Randolph 1... it seems that ISU should have offered a degree just for those who figured out the navigation of Watterson Towers! And

oh yeah, I forgot to mention that Watterson's elevators were notorious for breaking down! In the two years that I attended Illinois State, I got stuck in the Watterson elevators *twice* myself and heard of **many** others who met the same fate! I wonder if they've fixed any of the problems plaguing that building in the last 10-15 years?

What's All This About Hugh Downs?

I felt too restless to write blogs, but I'm too tired to take the kids anywhere, so it's either write in my blog or sit here on my computer looking up scary ailments that could be afflicting my husband. So blogging it is...

As you may have read on other tangents.org blogs, our community theater is about to open its production of *The Nerd* – an (I still hate putting the word “an” in front of hilarious, but oh well) hilarious comedy written by Larry Shue. My husband is portraying the Nerd, a character named Rick Steadman, who is without any social etiquette whatsoever, to put it mildly. He does an excellent job at the part, if I do say so myself, and that's a compliment, really it is – he's not a nerd in real life! In the play, Rick has an autographed picture of Hugh Downs, and all this time during rehearsal, I've been wondering, who is Hugh Downs? The name sounds familiar, but I didn't know anything about him, so I looked him up. Turns out he is a fellow Ohioan, born in Akron, went to high school in Lima, and he's still alive. He anchored the newsmagazine show *20/20*, hosted the *Today* show, was the announcer for *The Tonight Show* with Jack Paar, and he also hosted the game show *Concentration*.

So having an autographed picture of Hugh Downs *is* quite nerdy. But then again, I looked him up on wikipedia, so what does that make me?

Ok, I just thought this was neat..

I was just doing a little late night surfing and found this in the "Odd News section". Seems like [fighting beetles](#) is a big thing.

After you see the video can you imagine the size of those beetles? According to Wikipedia, the [Rhinoceros Beetle](#) are among the largest beetles in the world. I don't think I want to see something that big crawling around in my house.

I'm not sure I like the idea of beetle fights, but then again we still have one or two frog jumping contests in the US. Probably much the same.

What is first degree murder?

I meant to post this a few days ago in response to the conviction of Ralph Lewis in the fatal accident that killed 16-year-old Corey Diamond ([CLICK HERE FOR STORY](#)). Apparently the jury didn't take much time, under three hours in fact, in deciding that yes, he is guilty of first-degree murder. This story made me wonder just what constitutes first-degree

murder. I had always thought that first-degree murder was a premeditated killing. The killer planned to kill someone and then carried it out. Maybe the plan wasn't always long and drawn out, but could have been mere seconds ago, "Okay, I've drawn my gun and I'm going to shoot you now." That would cover killing police and victims in armed robbery.

So what happened in the case of Ralph Lewis killing Corey Diamond? Well, apparently Lewis was trying to get away from police after a botched attempt to make a purchase from a store using false ID. He wove in and out of traffic and through red lights until finally smashing into the car where Diamond was a passenger. Now, in my mind, first-degree murder in this death would have meant Lewis thought to himself while trying to get away from the police, "Hey, here's a car with some people in it- I think I'll just crash my truck into it and see if I can kill anyone." This of course is not what happened and even the article discussing his conviction doesn't say it happened this way. So it would seem that I am wrong in what constitutes first-degree murder. Here's what [Wikipedia says about the subject](#):

After the Supreme Court placed new requirements on the imposition of the [death penalty](#), most states adopted one of two schemes. In both, third degree murder became the catch-all, while first degree murder was split. The difference was whether some or all first degree murders should be eligible for the most serious penalty (generally death, but sometimes life in prison without the possibility of [parole](#)).

- *The first scheme, used by [Pennsylvania](#) among other states:*

- 1. First Degree Murder: A [premeditated murder](#), and (in some states) murders involving certain especially dangerous felonies, such as [arson](#) or [rape](#), or committed by an [inmate](#) serving a life sentence.*

2. Second Degree Murder: Non pre-meditated killing.

3. Third Degree Murder: Any other murder.

- The second scheme, used by [New York](#) among other states, as well as the [Model Penal Code](#):

1. First Degree Murder: Murder involving special circumstances, such as murder of a police officer, judge, fireman or witness to a crime; multiple murders; and torture or especially heinous murders. Note that a “regular” premeditated murder, absent such special circumstances, is not a first-degree murder; murders by poison or “lying in wait” are not per se first-degree murders. First degree murder is pre-meditated. ^[55] However, the [New York Court of Appeals](#) struck down the [death penalty](#) as [unconstitutional](#) in the case of *People v. Taylor*. ^[56]
2. Second Degree Murder: Any premeditated murder or felony murder that does not involve special circumstances. ^[57]

The death of Corey Diamond doesn't seem to fit the definition of any of these. But then Wikipedia just has a generalized definition for the entire US. As this happened in Illinois, a look at IL law is necessary. From the [Illinois Criminal Code of 1961](#):

(a) A person who kills an individual without lawful justification commits first degree murder if, in performing the acts which cause the death:

(1) he either intends to kill or do great bodily harm

to that individual or another, or knows that such acts will

cause death to that individual or another; or

(2) he knows that such acts create a strong

probability of death or great bodily harm to that individual or another; or

(3) he is attempting or committing a forcible felony

other than second degree murder.

The rest of this section of code is about the death penalty. As far as this case goes, apparently they got Lewis on the second one listed. My own thought on first-degree murder seems to be contained in the first part and so was clearly limited, at least in Illinois law. So it sounds like any time someone does something that they know could lead to “a strong probability of death or great bodily harm” to someone they could be found guilty of first-degree murder. Is it just me or does this seem kind of broad? Say in the classic example of moving a very heavy object like a piano or safe either to or from a second (or higher) story room using a rope and going through the window. Now suppose, also from the classic example, that the rope breaks just as someone is passing under so that the piano/safe kills the person. By Illinois law, the people moving the piano/safe are guilty of first-degree murder since they knew there was a possibility that the rope could break, causing the death of anyone who happens to be passing below at the time!

Am I just being pedantic about all of this, or does this case make you wonder too? I’m not saying that Lewis was completely innocent of everything and should walk away scott-free. Crimes were clearly committed, but should one of them have been counted first-degree murder? Please discuss.

Pinata Pilgrimage

I didn't blog all weekend because we made a few-hundred-miles trek to the Chicago suburbs for my nephew's 5th birthday party. We stuffed ourselves silly over there because as much as we love where we live, the restaurant choice can grow kind of boring. So, being in a different area had us stopping for food every chance we got, but by the end of the weekend, we were a wee bit regretful... I think that midnight case of White Castles are what did us in. Since there aren't any White Castles near us, we had to stock up and buy a whole case since they reheat pretty well. We stopped there on the way out of the area, and then we had to smell them all the way home – yuck. They taste good but don't smell so great, especially when it's time for bed... So, as you can see, we did fit in a bit of culture on our trip. For those who aren't familiar with White Castle, it's a fast food chain found in the midwest that specializes in mini-hamburgers, also known as "sliders". They aren't just mini-hamburgers, though, they're steam-grilled, and they have a very unique taste... not to mention an, ahem, interesting side effect when you feed them to pets and small children. I will not elaborate; let's just say that my kids really like them, but the next day our noses were paying for it.

We also found time to stop at an ethnic grocery store for something my husband has been looking for called *Halva*, which is a Middle Eastern dessert. I had never tried it before, and I really like to try ethnic foods, so we picked some up. It is pretty good! The halva we got was actually from Macedonia, and though it tastes nothing like it, I would best describe its texture as that of the 'astronaut' ice cream. You know, the freeze dried ice cream that they sell at space museums?

And to round out our cultural experience, my nephew had a pinata at his birthday party. Pardon my spelling it wrong, I can't find the special n with the tilde over it they use in the spanish alphabet. So in my blog, it will be known as a pinata. Just in case you are not familiar with what a pinata entails, check out Wikipedia's explanation:

A succession of blindfolded, stick-wielding children try to break the piñata in order to collect the sweets (traditionally fruit, such as sugarcane) and/or toys inside of it. It has been used for hundreds of years to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas and Easter.

Seems that Wikipedia figured out how to do the tilde... but anyway, yes you read that right – **blindfolded, stick-wielding children!** Actually, it's customary to use a baseball bat instead of a stick, yet oddly enough, I don't think I've ever been part of a pinata party where a parent didn't have to step in and break it open themselves – this one being no exception. It went pretty well, though we did almost have a casualty – my nephew took his first whack at the pinata, and his dad had not cleared the area, so CRACK went the bat against the cell phone he was wearing... but I guess all was well, especially since someone had talked them out of their original plan: giving a bunch of 5-year-olds an *aluminum* bat with which to whack at the pinata. Thank goodness for the insight! If you get a chance, you should check out the pinata scene in the movie [Parenthood](#), it's hilarious... the kids at the party lose interest after not being able to get it open, so the scene cuts to [Steve Martin](#) beating the heck out of the thing as it lays on the floor. Nothing like that at my nephew's party, in fact, his pinata opened rather easily. And when it did break open, there wasn't the usual melee either... the kids were actually quite orderly in picking up the pinata "guts". I was a little worried because the last time I was at a birthday party with a pinata, the kids all piled in a heap on top of each other, and the kid at the bottom ended up with

a bloody lip.

So, overall, great weekend, even if it lacked sleep – lots of driving and we didn't get home until 3:30 in the morning! And I have a few weeks to decide whether or not we will be brave enough to attempt a pinata at my daughter's 4th birthday party... maybe that will be enough time for her to forget that her cousin had one...

One thing is for sure, if we have a pinata, we will *not* have an aluminum bat on the premises!