

## March of the Penguins

A new documentary for the whole family comes to town with the *March of the Penguins*, a nature film that reaches diabetic on the sweetness scale yet, at the same time, tells an almost unbelievable story of survival in the most inhospitable place on earth, the Antarctic ice shelf. (For those of you suffering through Washington swelter, you could do worse than spend its 80 minutes in the Frozen South.)

A vast colony of Emperor penguins waddling and sliding around hard-white ice offers a vision of cuteness taken to several powers. Their luscious fatness in that crisp, trim-lined formal get-up just has to make one smile. But this sunny introduction is just openers for what is an arduous trek for the penguin colony which (who knows how Mother Nature decides these things?) must traverse 70 miles of ice at the end of each summer (March down there) to arrive at their ancient spawning grounds.

The real dilemma for the colony comes when, after the eggs are laid, the Emperor males must guard the eggs for three months in the coldest winter weather, without food, while the females must march back to thinner ice in search of undersea eats. Then, by the time the females return from their own trek in July, the babies hatch and, in turn, must be cared for and fed by the females while the males have to march back yet again to find seafood in Antarctic waters to survive.

All of this to-ing and fro-ing to sustain the breed is depicted in fascinating detail in the *March of the Penguins*, a French-made documentary, sponsored in part by the National Geographic Society, and being released here as a family feature (it is rated "G"). Filmmaker Luc Jacquet and his two intrepid (or should we say crazy?) cameramen documented this journey over a full year, withstanding--as did most of the penguins--temperatures of up to 70 degrees below zero and winds of 100 mph. (You have to wonder who exactly did the catering for this crew.)

Narrated in a smooth, mellifluous mode by Morgan Freeman, the *March of the Penguins* is one of the great nature "survival" epics ever captured on film. The "G" rating is fair. The mating of the penguins is suggested (in some delicate shots of penguin courtship) but never shown. The inevitable deaths on the ice appear briskly and quietly. Most little kids will inevitably identify with the penguins and root for them to make it; many will ask mommy and daddy for a penguin stuffed animal;...who knows, some may even try to hit the folks up for a tuxedo!

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