

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## ***Happy Feet Two* (2011)**

George Miller

### OVERVIEW

**Director** George Miller was born in 1945 in Chinchilla, Queensland, Australia. From an early age, Miller was interested in both film and medicine: he practiced for several years as a medical doctor while simultaneously making short films with producer Byron Kennedy. Miller and Kennedy achieved huge international success with *Mad Max*, Miller's feature film debut. Kennedy Miller Productions went on to produce two *Mad Max* sequels and films by other Australian directors such as John Duigan and Phillip Noyce. Miller then directed high-profile and internationally acclaimed films including *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), *Lorenzo's Oil* (1992), *Babe* (1995), and *Happy Feet* (2006), for which he won an Oscar. Miller returned to *Mad Max* in 2015 with *Mad Max: Fury Road*, which earned widespread praise and prompted the writing of two additional sequels.

**Film** *Happy Feet Two* is a sequel to Miller's *Happy Feet* (2006), which focuses on a young emperor penguin named Mumble who struggles to fit in with the other penguins because, in contrast to them, he is terrible at singing and loves to dance. At the end of *Happy Feet*, Mumble is finally accepted by his community and gets together with Gloria, the female penguin he loves. The sequel focuses on Mumble and on his son with Gloria, Erik, who is not so sure about dancing but has his own dream of learning how to fly.

**Background** Like *Happy Feet*, *Happy Feet Two* is a computer-animated jukebox musical. After completing *Happy Feet*, Miller founded Dr. D, an animation studio that produced *Happy Feet Two* but closed down afterward because of the film's lack of commercial success. *Happy Feet Two* featured many of the same voice actors as the original, although the singer P!nk voiced Gloria in place of Brittany Murphy, who died in 2009. Brad Pitt and Matt Damon join the cast as krill. As in *Happy Feet*, there are a couple of brief live-action sequences with human beings.

### CHARACTERS

*Mumble* – emperor penguin who loves to dance

*Gloria* – emperor penguin who loves to sing; mate of Mumble

*Erik* – baby emperor penguin; offspring of Mumble and Gloria

*Ramón* – Adélie penguin; friend of Mumble

*Lovelace* – rockhopper penguin; leader of Adélie colony

*Sven* – puffin passing himself off as a penguin who can fly; worshipped by Adélie colony

*Bryan* – elephant seal

*Will* – a krill

*Bill* – a krill

### SYNOPSIS

A baby emperor penguin named Erik—son of Mumble and Gloria—is taunted by the other penguins and runs away with two friends. They follow Mumble's friend Ramón, an Adélie penguin, to the Adélie colony. There, charismatic penguin leader Lovelace is singing the praises of Sven, who says he is a penguin and impresses all the other penguins with his ability to fly. Erik, too, is awed by this, and he takes to heart Sven's motto: "If you want it, you must will it. If you will it, it will be yours." Mumble catches up with Erik and his fellow runaways in time to witness this and worry, on the grounds that willpower cannot make an emperor penguin able to fly. Mumble heads back toward the emperor colony with the babies.

Meanwhile, a huge piece of ice moves, eventually crashing into the coastline that forms one edge of the emperor colony. As a result, the other emperor penguins are trapped, surrounded on all sides by high walls of ice. Mumble and the babies reach home and discover this to their horror. They attempt to solve the problem in various ways. First, they recruit the Adélie, Lovelace, and Sven to help provide fish for the trapped emperors. Then, Mumble suggests that they try to use dancing to alter the landscape, hoping that their weight can move the ice or that they can kick enough snow off the top to make an upward path for the trapped emperors. This fails. Mumble seeks help from an elephant seal, Bryan, whose life he previously saved; though Bryan at first refuses, Erik bursts into an indignant operatic song, which causes Bryan and the other seals to agree to help. Together, the seals and penguins are able to shake the snow and ice enough to enable the emperor colony to escape.

## SCENES

**Childhood struggles** – The emperor penguins sing and dance together. Little Erik, son of Mumble and Gloria, hesitates to join in. Mumble encourages him, but when he does dance, he ends up falling facedown into a hole in the ice and getting stuck with his rear end in the air. The other penguins laugh at him. Mumble tries to console Erik but fails. Ramón, Mumble’s Adélie penguin friend, appears and talks to Erik.



**Running away** – A little later, the penguins realize that Erik and two of the other baby penguins have disappeared. Mumble leaves in pursuit of them, thinking they might have followed Ramón back to the Adélie colony.



**Krill discovery** – A swarm of krill swims in the ocean. One krill, named Will, expresses to his friend Bill a desire to see what lies beyond the swarm. Bill protests that there is no “beyond” the krill swarm, but Will persists, trying to reach the edge. Bill follows him. They get to the edge of the swarm and discover a whale and various other fish trying to eat the krill. They are horrified.



**Adélie colony** – The three baby penguins catch up with Ramón. Mumble follows their tracks from some distance. The babies and Ramón get to the Adélie colony, where Ramón is reunited with his four best friends. Colony leader Lovelace (a rockhopper penguin) appears in the front of the crowd, backed up by several female Adélie penguins singing in a gospel choir style. He is now wearing a colorful sweater.



**Sven** – Lovelace introduces Sven, whom he calls “a very special penguin,” standing on top of a tall iceberg and then flying off it. Ramón and Erik marvel at the sight of a penguin who can fly. Sven and Lovelace tell the crowd the story of



Sven's flight from the destruction of his homeland, which led to his discovery and rehabilitation by the "aliens who rule the sea." Eventually, the story reveals, Sven met Lovelace when Lovelace was also found by these aliens. But they explain that they left the alien ship when Sven saw the aliens eating roasted birds (chickens). Arrived at the Adélie colony, Sven is worshipped by the inhabitants because he can fly.

**Mantra** – Sven encourages the penguins to say "If you want it, you must will it. If you will it, it will be yours" whenever they want something. Erik is very impressed and vows to learn to fly using his willpower. Mumble arrives around this time and is disturbed, knowing that willpower cannot make a penguin fly. He makes the three baby emperor penguins leave with him.



**Accidents** – While Mumble and the baby penguins are on the way home, a huge chunk of ice moves toward the emperor colony, crashing into the existing ice and trapping the emperor penguins in a sort of bowl whose steep ice edges they cannot climb. Mumble and the babies run into an elephant seal, Bryan, traveling with his two babies. Bryan falls through some ice and gets stuck far below the surface. He is ready to give up, but Mumble vows to try to help him.



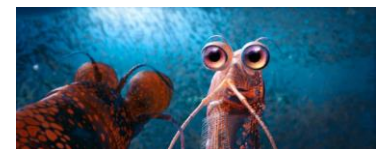
**Problem solving** – Will (a krill) decides to evolve by turning carnivore. Accompanied by Bill, he leaves the water and takes a tiny bite out of a leopard seal. Simultaneously, Mumble decides to taunt this leopard seal into chasing him, luring it toward the wall of ice that is trapping the elephant seal and getting it to use its body weight to break the ice. Restored to safety and very moved, Bryan thanks Mumble and tells him he can come ask him to return the favor anytime.



**Attempts to help** – Mumble and the babies return the edge of the colony; they can see and hear the other emperor penguins far below but cannot reach them. One of the babies goes to recruit help from the Adélie penguins; Mumble and the other two make multiple trips to get fish from the sea and bring it back, pitching it over the edge to feed the colony. Mumble and Erik have an argument, though, when Erik asserts that the others can learn to fly like Sven and then escape the trap, while Mumble insists that emperor penguins cannot fly. Erik panics; only Gloria singing to him from below can calm him down.



**Dispute** – Back in the water, Bill and Will see some brilliantly colored jellyfish, including several juveniles, swim by. They are awed. Bill suggests that they have children of their own. Will replies that they are both males. Bill suggests that they adopt. Will says no, he is too busy adapting. Will and Bill go their separate ways.



**Threats and assistance** – A large flock of skuas approaches the emperor penguin colony. The penguins' attempts to find a way out of the trap have all proven fruitless. But the flock of Adélie penguins, Lovelace, and Sven arrive at this point; they chase away the skuas and help get fish for the emperor penguins.





**Short-lived human help** – Lovelace sees in the distance the “alien” ship on which he briefly lived with Sven. He decides to try to get the aliens’ attention by dancing so that they can help. He succeeds, and the aliens begin to try to help, but a terrible blizzard hits, and when it passes, the penguins discover that the aliens have gone. Sven flies a little way toward the sea and discovers that the sea is frozen over, so the aliens’ ship cannot return.



**Sven’s admission** – Sven and the Adélie penguins announce that they have to leave because they now need to go a long way to get to fish even for themselves. Erik tries to get Sven to teach the other penguins how to fly like him. Sven is forced to admit that he is a puffin, not a penguin. The penguins are angry with him for lying to them; he admits that he was lonely and wanted to be one of them.



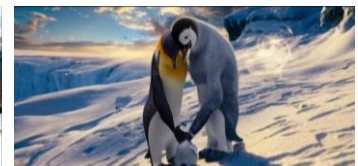
**Dancing** – Mumble has an idea: he suggests that he and the other penguins who are high up should dance so that they can make enough snow fall down to make a path that the emperor penguins can walk up. Gloria leads the trapped penguins in singing. Will, the krill, who is nearby and hears them, tries dancing himself and laughs with delight. Will ends up falling through a hole in the ice to the water, where he is reunited with Bill and the other krill.



**Asking for help** – Realizing that the penguins, though numerous, are too small to move enough snow, Mumble goes with Erik to the elephant seal territory in order to ask Bryan to return the favor. Bryan is busy fighting with another seal and tells Mumble he cannot help him at the moment. Mumble walks away in defeat, but Erik sings an operatic song demanding that the elephant seal keep his promise.



**Success** – Bryan and the other elephant seals, chastened, follow Mumble and Erik to the edge of the emperor colony. They join in the effort to use their bodies to move snow. The krill hear them and decide to join in from underneath, though they do not know why. Finally, it is enough; the penguins have a path to escape their trap.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Mumble** No longer a misfit juvenile, Mumble is now an adult emperor penguin whose dancing is welcomed (and even emulated) by the community. As the mate of Gloria and father of Erik, Mumble takes family responsibilities very seriously. However, he struggles to say the right things to his son.

**Loving** Most of Mumble’s actions in the film are motivated by his love for Gloria and Erik. He is very involved in his son’s life and frequently wants to be the one to talk to him or go places with him. Mumble tries especially hard to save the trapped penguins because Gloria is among them.

**Anxious** Mumble spends much of the film feeling anxious. He worries about Erik’s hesitance to dance and his blind faith in Sven, but then he also worries that he has said the wrong thing to Erik in his attempt to help him. Indeed, his anxiety sometimes makes him speak to Erik more harshly than he means to.

**Creative** Ultimately, Mumble’s creativity solves two big problems. First, he is able to free the elephant seal, Bryan, from a fatal trap by tricking a leopard seal into helping. Then, he figures out how to free his fellow penguins from their trap using dancing (and using the help of several species).

**Erik** Erik is the baby son of Gloria and Mumble. Although less of a misfit than Mumble had been in his youth, Erik hesitates to join in the colony's dancing and singing. He loves his parents but is also curious about the wider world.

**Naïve** Erik has learned little of the world and remains quite naïve. When he encounters Sven and his willpower mantra, Erik is extremely impressed and thinks it will work in every circumstance. Later, he believes that the trapped emperor penguins can simply use that mantra to gain the ability to fly and thus flee the trap.

**Independent** While very young, Erik is independent. He sneaks away from the emperor colony without his parents' knowledge after being bullied. He also takes the initiative to try again to persuade Bryan to help after his initial refusal—using an operatic style of singing that no other penguins have.

**Sven** Sven is a puffin who is passing himself off as a penguin who can fly, thereby gaining the admiration of many penguins. Having lost his home and family, Sven is willing to lie in order to fit in with the Adélie colony.

**Deceitful** Sven misrepresented himself to Lovelace as a penguin and continues in the same vein when Lovelace introduces him to the Adélie colony. It is only when Erik presses Sven to teach the trapped emperor penguins how to fly that he reveals the truth—in other words, only when he has no choice.

**Fearful** When the humans' ship on which he was once held captive appears in the distance, Sven panics and has to hide from the penguins in order to compose himself. He is terrified after seeing humans eating chicken (which, he reasons, might mean they would also eat puffins). Sven also fears being alone.

## THEMES

### Society

**Identity** Identity was a key theme in *Happy Feet*, and it continues to be important to *Happy Feet Two*, though in somewhat different ways. Whereas in *Happy Feet* Mumble was being told by his father and other adults that he would not really be a penguin unless he could stop dancing and learn to sing, in *Happy Feet Two* there is the character of Sven, a puffin who is pretending to be a penguin. This time it is Mumble who expresses doubt about someone else's penguin identity: when Erik insists that they should all be able to learn to fly because Sven is a penguin and he can fly, Mumble replies, "I don't know what kind of penguin Sven is." Of course, the important difference is that Mumble was simply a penguin who was a little different, while Sven is in fact not a penguin at all. Still, Erik resembles young Mumble when he tries to stretch the possibilities of what a penguin can do. Bill and Will, too, resist and try to overcome the limitations imposed on them by their identity as krill. Will takes a bite out of a leopard seal to try to change himself from prey to predator.

*Illustrative moment:* When Lovelace introduces Sven to the Adélie colony, he emphasizes that Sven is worthy of adulation because he is a penguin who can fly. The Adélie penguins, feet firmly on the ground, gaze in awe as Sven jumps off a tall iceberg and soars over the colony. The idea of a penguin having the ability to fly is revolutionary for them.

### Politics

**Power** Characters experience varying degrees of power and powerlessness throughout the film. Generally speaking, power inheres in basic physical realities. The emperor penguins experience a massive loss of power when they are trapped by four walls of ice. Mumble seeks the assistance of the elephant seals in moving the ice and snow because they are so much larger than penguins and thus able to have more effect on the physical environment. Sven has the power to ingratiate himself with the penguins because he can fly. But power also comes from personal decisions. Mumble's creativity and optimism give him the power to find a way to free Bryan the elephant seal from his trap. Gloria's

composure and her singing abilities give her the power to calm Erik when he is panicking about the emperors' fate. Erik's indignation and love for his father gives him the power to confront the elephant seals with song when they refuse to help the penguins near the end of the film.

*Illustrative moment:* During the first conversation in the film between Bill and Will, Will insists on his power to make his own individual decisions despite being part of a krill swarm. Bill initially protests that "there is only swarm" and that they have no power to escape it, but Will persists in swimming to the edge. Bill follows him and sees that Will is right: they do have the power to act as individuals.

## **Relationships**

**Parenthood** Mumble and Gloria's love and concern for their son, Erik, is central to the film. Parenting seems to come naturally to Gloria, but not to Mumble. One of the key elements of *Happy Feet* was the struggle of Memphis, Mumble's father, to accept his son's differences. The idea of a son who did not conform to the emperor penguin customs was extremely difficult for Memphis to grasp. In *Happy Feet Two*, however, the shoe is on the other foot: Mumble is having his own problems parenting Erik. Erik is not sure he wants to dance, and Mumble struggles to accept this: he encourages Erik to dance in the film's first scene, but Erik slips and falls into a puddle, causing the other penguins to laugh at him. After Erik meets Sven and becomes obsessed with the idea that willpower can make anything happen (including making penguins fly), Mumble has a difficult time telling Erik the truth without quashing his optimistic spirit. Mumble becomes frustrated with Erik's idolization of Sven and sometimes speaks more harshly than he means to as a result. Things improve when Sven's deception is revealed.

*Illustrative moment:* As Erik insists that the trapped emperor penguins can simply learn to fly like Sven in order to escape, Mumble becomes frustrated and insists that penguins cannot fly. Erik tearfully articulates the implications of this: they will die. Mumble cannot come up with a good answer. But Gloria, far below but able to overhear the shouting, encourages Mumble to walk away while she sings a calming song to Erik. Erik is comforted by her song.

## **Life stages**

**Coming of age** Unlike Mumble in *Happy Feet*, who needed to be accepted by other community members, Erik in *Happy Feet Two* needs to learn some realities about the world. He runs away from the colony early in the film after the other penguins laugh at him for falling. He seems never to have left the colony before. But Erik is very inexperienced and thus easily taken in by Sven—both his seemingly miraculous ability to fly and his mantra, "If you want it, you must will it. If you will it, it will be yours." Erik takes this at face value, believing that willpower alone can make anything happen. Over the course of the film, he learns that willpower is not magic. He also learns, though, that forceful individual and collective action can have dramatic results. With Erik's help, a multi-species group of animals is able to free the trapped emperor penguins.

*Illustrative moment:* The moment in the film when Erik most strikingly comes of age is during his and Mumble's embassy to the elephant seals. Mumble asks Bryan to honor his promise and come help the trapped emperors, and Bryan refuses since he is in the middle of a dominance fight with another seal. Mumble gives up and is starting to walk away, but Erik will not accept defeat. He begins to sing, in an operatic style unique to him, about his father's bravery and the need to keep promises. The elephant seals are impressed, and they agree to help.

## **Appearance**

**Deception** Sven's posing as a penguin lasts through much of the film and has far-reaching consequences. This deception began by accident: when Lovelace met Sven on the humans' ship, he simply assumed that Sven was another type of penguin. Sven continued the deception because he saw it as a means to solve his own greatest problem: loneliness following the destruction of his home and all his loved ones. Sven does not want so much to be worshipped by the penguins as to be accepted by them, but he sees that worship is a good way to keep a hold on their affections. Ultimately, the other penguins

do seem to forgive Sven for his dishonesty; he participates in the collective dancing effort, and he remains with the Adélie penguins at the end of the film. But the worship certainly comes to an end, and Erik seems uninterested in Sven after discovering the truth.

*Illustrative moment:* Sven is afraid to reveal the truth: he only does so when he has no other choice. When Sven, Lovelace, and the Adélie penguins arrive at the emperor colony to help, Erik directly asks him to teach the trapped penguins to fly like him. Sven hems and haws for a while, then faces reality and admits that he can fly because he is a puffin, not because he is a penguin with special skills that he can teach others.

## **Ethics**

**Solidarity** In the end, solidarity saves the day. This includes solidarity both within and across species. No single hero (Sven) can save the trapped penguins. Instead, it requires a coalition of emperor penguins, Adélie penguins, a rockhopper penguin, a puffin, elephant seals, and krill to change the physical environment enough to enable the trapped penguins to escape. This coalition comes together thanks largely to Mumble. He knows the Adélie penguins and Lovelace in the first place because he ventured on his own and became friends with them in *Happy Feet*. The elephant seals are on board because Mumble saved Bryan's life earlier in the film and because Erik takes the extra step to try again to ask for their help after Mumble's request is denied. The krill are engaged simply by discovering the fun of dancing. While human beings briefly try to help, their help is short-lived and inadequate. It is solidarity among those directly affected by the environment that solves the problem.

*Illustrative moment:* The emperor penguins already have a habit of solidarity within their own group. When they realize they are trapped, they get organized immediately, sending several search parties out in different directions to look for a way out. The film does not show any dissension among the emperor penguins during their time being trapped; they know that any solution will be a collective solution.

## **Other themes**

**Climate change** The big environmental problem of *Happy Feet* was human overfishing, causing a fish shortage for the penguins. *Happy Feet Two* targets climate change specifically. The film's first images are of melting and cracking Antarctic ice, and the major problem in the film is that a huge chunk of ice breaks away from its former spot and floats along the water to then crash into the emperor colony. Whereas the challenge of the first film was easily (some might say too easily) resolved by the imposition of an Antarctic fishing ban, no such simple solution presents itself in the second film. Human beings on a nearby ship start to help the penguins by using their ice axes, but they are driven away by a storm and do not come back. The Antarctic animals solve the immediate problem of the ice trap themselves. However, the film does not propose any human action that could be taken to alleviate the deeper problem. Its solution of animal solidarity is an uplifting but probably fantastical one.

*Illustrative moment:* The movement of the chunk of ice is portrayed very dramatically in the film. It slowly and loudly breaks away from a larger ice wall, then moves toward the land of the emperor penguins. It makes contact with the new landmass loudly, shudderingly, and devastatingly, creating clouds of snow and ice particles. The emperor penguins can only watch in horror.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. In *Happy Feet Two*, the problem of the ice trap is resolved when multiple species of animals work together to physically alter it. What do you think of the ending in terms of the message being sent to child viewers about sustainability and climate change?
2. What do you make of the inclusion of the krill characters, who are not central to the plot?
3. How did you react to Mumble's parenting struggles? Do you think he is a good parent?

4. *Happy Feet* had a clear message about being true to oneself. Do you think *Happy Feet Two* carries the same message with regard to Erik's journey, or not?

5. Were you sympathetic to Sven despite his deception? Why or why not?