

## More or Less Same Formula in 'Kung Fu Panda 2'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 26, 2011 - 8:21am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Good and evil, chase and fight. Those are the two basic formulas that dominate “Kung Fu Panda 2,” the sequel to the very popular first film. That redundancy is helped by the spirituality of an animated panda and some spectacular 3D rendering.

That optional 3-D is put to good use in this go around, creating a depth and energy in the stunningly complex landscape, that becomes a character in a way. All the voice talent from the first film – including Jack Black and Angelina Jolie – are back to lend persona to the lovable heroes, but in the sequel they serve more as background to the repetitive chase and fight sequences.

Po (Jack Black) is the cushy Kung Fu Panda, having earned his Dragon Master credibility in the first film. With him are his team, the “Furious Five” – Tigress (Angelina Jolie), Mantis (Seth Rogen), Monkey (Jackie Chan), Viper (Lucy Liu) and Crane (David Cross), mentored of course by Master Shifu (Dustin Hoffman), who has just achieved inner peace. When the gang goes after a rogue peacock named Lord Shen (Gary Oldman), it begins a serious fight for justice and allows for the Kung Fu Panda’s personal journey.

Shen has perfected a new way to defeat Kung Fu...using the storm of fireworks as a weapon. When the team learns that Shen has taken some masters prisoner and captured their village, they go on the quest to free them and save all of China. Shen is obsessed also with a prophecy that predicts his demise from a black and white creature. This involved him in Po’s past when he raided a village in search of that destiny. This “memory” is part of the hypnosis that causes Po to be initially defeated in the Shen battles.



Wild Ride: Monkey (voice of Jackie Chan), Po (Jack Black) and Tigress (Angelina Jolie) in 'Kung Fu Panda 2'



Photo credit: © Dreamworks Animation

The challenge is both physical and mental for Po, as he needs to recollect a certain path in his background to stand toe-to-toe with the evil peacock. Black and white, opposite ends of the Yin and Yang collide in an epic encounter, that tests both the Kung Fu moves and the inner grooves of life's experiences.

First off, the film is great looking. The combination of water, earth and Chinese architecture is a feast for the eyes, using the 3D technology to the fullest. A drop of water has the same resonance as a full-on fireworks war, and the fight choreography of the Kung Fu masters is surreal and comically appropriate. There is an especially good fight in the beginning, where a lone bunny musician becomes ensnared in the middle, with all the kicking warriors taking care not to interrupt his fragile song.

The villain Shen is nicely oily, and appropriately given a pretentious nature as voiced by Gary Oldman. The biggest complaint about characters are on the hero side. Not only are the Furious Five involved, but there is Po, Master Shifu and Masters Oxen, Rhino and Croc. With all the menagerie, there is barely time for dialogue between action sequences, which leaves Seth Rogen's Mantis actually repeating a joke as one of his five lines. Besides Jolie's Tigress in an extended role, everyone else could have (and probably did) phone it in.

The good-and-evil, chase-and-fight aspect gets a bit of reprieve in Po's inner journey involving memory. His father is a goose, and the nature of that pairing is explained in flashbacks that have a nice style of their own (the computer-type animation morphs into pen-and-ink in those memory sequences). The point of all this takes time to build, but there is a lucid pay-off, and throws in some emotion amid the sound and fury.

Master Shifu has achieved "inner peace," but what does that mean for Po? This question becomes part of the quest, and that is what separates the Kung Fu Panda series from it's other counterparts, the spiritual message which blends Buddhism, Zen and the focus of the martial arts. This was much more prevalent in the first film – which is superior – but there is enough spirituality in the sequel to lend victory beyond the Kung Fu fight.



Peacock Strut: Lord Shen (Gary Oldman) in 'Kung Fu Panda 2'  
Photo credit: © Dreamworks Animation

Plus the film doesn't take itself too seriously. There are very funny greek-chorus style "aside" lines that obviously allow the adults in the audience to share in some camera winking. Simple bits like a heroic speech by Po expressed from too far away, with the villain Shen straining to hear the noble rhetoric, is right on the mark.

The philosophy behind the sequel was obviously to focus on the action, and although it cuts into much of the what made the first film that much better, there is enough to latch onto to celebrate the Kung Fu Panda once again, and to let the fireworks begin.

*"Kung Fu Panda 2" opens everywhere May 26th. See local listings for 3D showings. Featuring the voices of Jack Black, Angelina Jolie, Seth Rogen, Jackie Chan, Gary Oldman, Dustin Hoffman, David Cross, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Lucy Liu. Screenplay by Jonathan Aibel and Glenn Burger, directed by Jennifer Yuh. Rated "PG"*



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