

## ‘The Secret Life of Pets 2’ Feels More Like a Cat Nap Than Catnip

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on June 14, 2019 - 4:55am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – As a pet owner, I know firsthand that I want an exciting life for my guinea pigs. When I’m off at work, I’d like to think that they throw parties or have some sort of hangouts with other guinea pigs or pets in the area. The alternative being the sad realization that they are stuck in their cage while I’m away, probably bored out of their little minds. “The Secret Life of Pets” franchise continues to brings the fantasy to life, even if the sequel feels too tame.

Let’s get back to the important part: the totally healthy fantasy social life I’ve created for my guinea pigs. Whenever I’m gone I like to imagine they are having fun (mis)adventures that may or may not include acts of superheroism or even crimes. “The Secret Life of Pets 2” continues to scratch that itch, even if this second time around has too many more narrative bugs that need to be worked out. The joy of the film has always come from the individual characters themselves, becoming our gateway into this world, but also the grounding rod. In the first film, they earned our attention with every spot-on mannerism and eccentricity, giving each respective pet the personality we assume each of our pets has. Too bad the charm isn’t as fetching as the first time.



*Photo credit: Universal Pictures*

“Minions” and “Puss in Boots” writer Brian Lynch tackles this more complicated sequel alone. Lynch was one of the three writers who wrote the screenplay for the first film, but where the first “Pets” benefitted from a team, “Pets 2” since as a solo attempt. The sequel continues on with the characters we have come to love in the first film, but then goes even further and stacks a few newcomers to the pile. If that wasn’t

already enough to disrupt the previously established balance of this wild world, then the numerous divergent storylines did the trick. Lynch makes sure that each side story does eventually meet up into an epic finale, but jumping from one to the other does nothing for the cinematic flow. Our attention ends up split so that any emotional moments are quickly sabotaged by sudden tonal shifts and we inevitably care less about each individual's struggles. What should have been a breezy walk in the dog park turns more into a dog day afternoon.

Thematically, all you really leave the film with is a confirmation of how bad circuses are, why elderly people should really be driving after dark, and that all of your future problems can be solved by manning up, Harrison Ford-style. At one point, the story takes our main dog Max to the countryside so that he can learn how to be less of a city boy and more of a ruff and gruff country canine. The city/country clash is amusing, but it's nothing new to bark home about. It would almost be endearing if it didn't come off as condescending every time this was done in film or television. All it ends up doing is glorifying one definition of masculinity and what makes a real man while simultaneously putting down any perceived feminine traits a male might have. It's sad to think that even dogs might have to deal with toxic masculinity.



Photo credit: Universal Pictures

Aside from that aspect, the worst thing I can say about "Pets 2" is that it is completely average. Directors Chris Renaud and Jonathan del Val do their best to juggle the many opposing elements, but what should have been a gracefully choreographed performance devolves into a three-ring circus. One of the best changes the film makes in the sequel, aside from the addition of Tiffany Haddish, Nick Kroll and a bored-sounding Harrison Ford, is replacing Max's voice actor to Patton Oswalt. His performance is the only reason the film had any emotional depth at all, even if it was as shallow as a puddle. The real MVPs of this entire debacle are Haddish and Kevin Hart, whose chemistry on-screen will always demand our full attention, even though the rest of the film may not.

*"The Secret Life of Pets 2" opened everywhere on June 7th. Featuring Patton Oswalt, Tiffany Haddish, Kevin Hart, Harrison Ford, Jenny Slate, Lake Bell, Nick Kroll, and Dana Carvey. Directed by Chris Renaud and Jonathan del Val. Written by Brian Lynch. Rated "PG"*



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