

## ‘The Call of the Wild’ Offers Only Tame Adventure

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 24, 2020 - 1:28pm

- [Alaska](#) [2]
- [Bradley Whitford](#) [3]
- [Cara Gee](#) [4]
- [Clark Gable](#) [5]
- [Dan Stevens](#) [6]
- [Environment](#) [7]
- [Harrison Ford](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [Husky](#) [10]
- [Jack London](#) [11]
- [Movie Review](#) [12]
- [Omar Sy](#) [13]
- [Spike Walters](#) [14]
- [St. Bernard](#) [15]
- [The Call of the Wild](#) [16]
- [Walt Disney Pictures](#) [17]



Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “The Call Of The Wild” is an old fashioned story with some expensive and unnecessary technological upgrades. Forgoing man’s best friend in reality, the film replaces the featured dog with an entirely digital creation ... which I can’t say was an improvement.

But the important thing to know going into the film is that Harrison Ford isn’t the star, a computer-generated (CGI) canine named Buck is ... so there’s no ignoring the faults of this digital dog who looks like an ungainly hybrid of a St. Bernard and a Collie. And despite its \$135 million dollar budget and CGI canine, it’s a slow moving throwback to the kind of films children of the 1980s may have stumbled upon on the old TV series “The Wonderful World Of Disney.”



Harrison Ford and Buck in ‘The Call of the Wild’

*Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures*

The film follows the basic storyline of Jack London’s classic 1903 source novel, with some of its rougher edges sanded off. Buck is a pampered city dog in the late 1800s when he’s dognapped and shipped to the Yukon gold rush to work on a sled team. He learns the law of

"club and fang" as he is tormented by captors, until he is taken in by a kindly Royal Canadian mailman (Omar Sy) and learns to become part of a pack – and its eventual leader – by delivering packages and letters throughout the territory.

Along the way Buck is bought by a cartoonish prospector (Dan Stevens, sporting a Snidley Whiplash mustache) and then later taken in by a grizzled old hermit (Harrison Ford) who looks right at home in grumpy old man mode. He's not crazy about people, but he seems to take a liking to the big lumbering brute. Scenes where the the two are supposed to bond and build friendship are where Buck's computer generation fails the most, with Ford playing a harmonica by the fire and the pooch hiding his old-man whiskey bottle. The problem is the dog looks too human and unreal, which leaves supposedly heartwarming scenes lost in the uncanny and spectacular computer-generated valley.

For an adventure film, there's not much in the way of actual adventure. And although it made me long for the great outdoors a bit, too often the backdrops have digital fakery written all over them, along with making the spare action sequences feel cold and sterile. The filmmakers seem to have blown their budget on Buck, who is actually portrayed by a man with motion capture technology. This portrayal makes you long for the genuinely charming old Hollywood dogs of old. Even the lead dog from "Turner and Hooch" has more genuine personality in one paw than does Buck in his overly exaggerated CGI recreation.



Buck Leads the Team in 'The Call of the Wild'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

As a family film, there is nothing that will frighten the smallest of children, but I wonder if kids will have the patience for it. With a running time of just 100 minutes, it ambles rather than races. Eventually Ford and Buck do go on an adventure to look for the undiscovered wilderness, but it's more of an amiable stroll through the woods than a rip-roaring adventure.

Eventually, Ford's character finds a river of gold, and Buck follows a mystical wolf into the woods – symbolizing his own animal instincts. I saw this with my seven-year-old twins, and they did sit still through the whole thing, but I could see they were getting antsy. At one point my son asked me when the man and dog were going to go on an adventure. I have to admit, I was wondering the same thing.

*"The Call of the Wild" opened everywhere on February 21st. Featuring Harrison Ford, Omar Sy, Cara Gee, Dan Stevens and Bradley Whitford. Screenplay adapted by Michael Green, from the novel by Jack London. Directed by Chris Sander. Rated "PG"*



[18]

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- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/the-call-of-the-wild>
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