Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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***Rating:** «« **out of** «««««*

Running Time: 86 minutes

The Secret Life of Pets proved to be something of a surprise success back in 2016, chronicling the lives of animals and what they get up to when their owners are away. It earned solid reviews from the press and a massive box office haul. So naturally, it was only a matter of time before audiences would be receiving a sequel. *The Secret Life of Pets 2* is bright, colorful and will certainly impress children. However, adults will find it nothing more than genial and forgettable. They’ll probably be most pleased by the fact that their kids are sufficiently distracted.

Even if you haven’t seen the original film, there’s nothing about what’s happening onscreen that will confuse latecomers to the series. Max (Patton Oswalt) is a Jack-Russell terrier living in a New York apartment who can communicate with other animals in the building. He and his shaggy cohabitant Duke (Eric Stonestreet) are happy living with their family. However, the arrival of a new baby has caused Max to fret over the child’s safety and welfare, resulting in something of a panicked state and crisis of confidence. When the family takes a vacation, Max leaves his most prized possession with Gidget (Jenny Slate), who promptly loses it and must recover the item before his return. Finally, a rabbit named Snowball (Kevin Hart) is asked by a pooch named Daisy (Tiffany Haddish) to help her rescue a tiger from an abusive circus owner.

This follow-up doesn’t seem in any way interested in detailing the secretive activities of pets.

Instead the script follows three separate plotlines that eventually converge in the final act. At least each offers a couple of chuckles here and there. Highlights include Rooster (Harrison Ford), a gruff Welsh Sheepdog who ultimately serves as something of a mentor to Max, intimidating the protagonist while subtly attempting to build his confidence. Ford’s voice work is very effective, and he manages to earn a few laughs with his less-than-enthused demeanor. There are also a few amusing sights as Gidget encounters the unhinged feline occupants of another apartment. And a couple of Snowball’s offhanded comments raise a smile.

Additionally, it is a nicely animated movie. The bold colors really pop off the screen, particularly when the characters move around the city or travel to a picturesque country farm. And of course, the furry characters look incredible as well, with great care taken to show distinctive hairs and textures on the leads. However, the movie goes a little overboard with oversized eyes. These characters have such enormous, glassy peepers that sometimes it seems like half of the frame is filled with gigantic pupils. Call this reviewer heartless, but he grew a bit tired by the constant doe-eyed looks emanating from the animal characters.

And while it’s pretty and a few of the gags work, many of the jokes land with a thud (including some unnecessary scatological humor) and are clearly geared to very young audiences. Although one wouldn’t expect too many surprises from a family film, none of the events or drama featured feels particularly urgent or exciting. There’s also a strange aspect to the tiger rescue subplot, which involves an animal being abused and a conflict involving knife blades and antagonists falling off a train. These bits and the happy-go-lucky lines that follow feel out of sync with the events being depicted.

The end result is a good-looking animated flick that, quite literally, is bright and colorful enough to entrance children. However, the story and overall product doesn’t aspire to separate itself from the tropes of numerous animated family pictures and won’t earn more than a shrug from older audiences. Overall, *The Secret Life of Pets 2* never seems overly interested in catering to anyone over the age of ten.

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