

## Magically fun 'Museum 2' offers delight to young and old

Contributed by Tim Riley  
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### NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN (Rated PG)

A few years back, Ben Stiller made the museum world a whole lot more interesting to movie audiences when he discovered all the exhibits came alive during his night shift as a security guard. The wildly successful "Night at the Museum" was destined for a repeat, if only because commerce demanded it.

How do you improve on what New York's Museum of Natural History has to offer? The answer is found in the sequel's lengthy title: "Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian." Indeed, it's all to be found in Washington, D.C.'s megaplex of antiquities.

This time around Ben Stiller's Larry Daley has become wealthy hawking his gadgets and inventions on TV. Still, he hasn't forgotten his museum roots, and on a visit to an evening event he learns from the officious Dr. McPhee (Ricky Gervais) that all the beloved exhibits are being crated and shipped for permanent storage in the bowels of the Smithsonian. This reminds me of the "Indiana Jones" movie where the artifacts are carted off to a subterranean federal archives warehouse, only to be forgotten for all time. Apparently, the exhibits at the Natural History Museum are familiar with this movie and wish to avoid the same fate.

Frankly, it's hard to see how the museum's Board of Directors would find interactive exhibits more appealing, since their own exhibits come to life at night. But then, museums usually keep daytime hours. Besides, you can't stop progress, and so everyone, from the miniature figurines of cowboy Jedediah (Owen Wilson) and Roman general Octavius (Steve Coogan) to the wax figures of the Neanderthals and Indian guide Sacajawea (Mizou Peck), get stuffed in wooden crates and shipped to Washington. Unfortunately, the new arrivals at the Smithsonian awaken the denizens of the Smithsonian, including Egyptian ruler Kahmunrah (Hank Azaria), who's in a foul mood after centuries of slumber.

The diminutive Jedediah manages to put out a distress call to Larry, who just might figure out a game plan with the help of his computer savvy adolescent son. Rushing off to the Nation's Capital, Larry breeches the security system of the Smithsonian, only to find that the Egyptian ruler is busy making alliances with some of history's most heinous villains.

The bad guys include Ivan the Terrible (Christopher Guest), who insists that he has a less fearsome name; a height-sensitive Napoleon (Alain Chabat); and a snarling Al Capone (Jon Bernthal). Fortunately, the museum seems to lack wax figures of Hitler, Pol Pot, Stalin and Mao Tse-tung, lest there be absolute carnage on a grand scale.

As it is, Kahmunrah, fueled by an overweening ego, is obsessed with unleashing the dark underworld forces locked behind a portal secured by the golden tablet. "Night of the Museum 2" isn't real heavy on story, relying instead on creating enough mayhem that people, such as this reviewer, are easily distracted by the likes of a feisty Amelia Earhart (Amy Adams) and an Albert Einstein bobblehead.

The irrepressible Amelia is the most amusing character, sparking Larry to rediscover some fun and adventure, and all the while jabbering away in vintage slang. Why does Amelia speak like Katherine Hepburn in a Howard Hawks movie, while the Egyptian ruler and Abe Lincoln utter the common jargon of today?

Not quite as pretty as Amelia Earhart, a vain General Custer (Bill Hader), often strokes his long, golden locks, while wallowing in low self-esteem for his military failure at Little Bighorn. The most amusing character is the pompous Egyptian pharaoh, who doesn't really appear that menacing, regardless of his futile efforts to insist that he's wearing a tunic, not a dress.

"Night of the Museum 2" has great fun bringing to life some very iconic items, such as the classic V-J Day in Times Square photo of the American sailor kissing a young woman or Grant Wood's "American Gothic" painting (which, to my knowledge, still resides at the Art Institute of Chicago).

The slapstick comedy and the vibrancy of inanimate objects contribute to a youngster's enjoyment of this delightful comedy. Meanwhile, adults may find delight in the lively realization of historical figures and cultural artifacts. But most of all, great fun is had for all in the fact that "Night of the Museum 2," though far from brilliant, is nevertheless often very funny and enjoyable for the simple pleasures derived from an abundance of clever special effects.

### DVD RELEASE UPDATE

In "Night of the Museum 2" there is a giant squid that gets a little frisky, but otherwise is not scary. It's a different story for the DVD release of "Silent Venom," a sci-fi action thriller about an unstoppable mutant snake species that breaks loose aboard a decommissioned submarine.

On a remote jungle island in the Pacific, Krista Allen has been studying a new breed of mutant snakes. When Tom Berenger comes along to evacuate the researchers from the island, the only way home is on an old sub making its final voyage to Taiwan.

Assisted by Luke Perry, Berenger, his crew and passengers soon find out they are not alone on the sub, and must fight off the hungry, vicious creatures stalking the crewmembers. To make matters more troublesome, they also have to evade attacking Chinese vessels.

Apparently, Samuel L. Jackson wasn't available for duty, so "Silent Venom" just isn't as funny as "Snakes on a Plane."

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