

“Time Moves Us Forward”

Their lives have progressed, and like all of us, they’ve grown older. Through change, growth and challenges new and old, life remains full. At the same time, some things are not, and will not be, any different than they ever have been.

Time moves us forward, as “Sex And The City 2” so clearly shows us through the lives of the four women we’ve followed for more than a decade now. Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda are not the women they were ten years ago. And, they are! It’s a contemplative paradox of life, to be in a different place, yet in the same place, simultaneously. There’s a delicate balance between being the person we’ve always been, while growing into the more mature, tested and complete person we’re forever becoming. The “fab four” demonstrate very distinctly that while change is inevitable, and while compromise is usually required, we will always come out ahead by just being ourselves.

“You’re not happy in... You’re not happy out.” Big is right to bluntly throw these words at his now-wife-of-two-years Carrie, as she’s being more demanding and high maintenance than ever. After years of struggle, contemplation, heartache and acceptance, time has moved her forward to finally give her what she thought she’s always wanted: marriage and stability. Along with this, and much to Carrie’s horror, is predictability. Carrie loves her marriage, but she obviously has grown scared of the predictability, fearing the sparkle will disappear, hijacked by a television in the bedroom. She does not want to eat take-out food at home, nor become the couple who watches TV night after night without talking. Time has moved her forward into this looming reality, and now she’s resisting it, holding onto her identity as a Manhattan social fashion mover who still wants to be dining in swanky restaurants and walking red carpets. Life has changed for Carrie by now in some “big” ways, but at the same time, she is not about to lose who she has always been and still wants to be.

Two young children at home will change the life of a former single gal faster than anything else will. Charlotte’s life is now where she dreamed for years she wanted it to be: She has a happy marriage, and despite the daily demands on her time and patience, she’s a mom! Time has moved Charlotte forward to her present place, one in which the reality of her life is playing catch up to her longstanding fantasy. As she later admits, she needs, and gets, a break! Who she was and who she is are clashing, and “time out” seems to be the best remedy for Charlotte getting her “old self” back.

After plenty of stressful complaining, Miranda finally does something about her unsatisfactory work situation. Instead of just blowing steam, she takes action, however spontaneously. She walks out on her less-than-rewarding law firm, refusing to be talked down to and unappreciated anymore. Over the years, time has moved her upward in her law career to where she worked hard to be. However, this same time has also moved her forward to take a bold step of change. While it’s a step she initially resists, one to launch her into a world of uncertainty, Miranda quickly discovers that she’s much happier and better off in her new circumstances.

There’s no winning the battle with aging, but Samantha puts up a pretty good fight. With her series of hormones and her usually unfailing libido, she puts a fantastic face on age “50-fucking-2.” It’s refreshing to see, in every way Samantha, that she’s very much the fabulous slut she’s always been. Meanwhile,

time has moved her forward to a place in which maintaining this title is all the more a challenge. While Samantha embraces the fact that she's growing older, she's not about to abandon all the pleasures of being "younger." Different in obvious ways than her three gal pals, Samantha remains very much her own person. Despite the obvious and sometimes disastrous missteps, her stamina is to be admired.

As we immerse ourselves in the latest capers of these four fictitious yet very human characters, it's easy to find at least parts of ourselves in each of them, and to assess our own lives and relationships via theirs. This of course has been a big factor in the huge fan base that the "Sex And The City" empire has acquired since Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda made their debut in 1998. Over the past 12 years, they've tried, and failed, and tried again, and generally speaking, succeeded. All the while, time has inevitably moved them forward, while they've managed to navigate that delicate balance between change and preservation.

It's all a big fantasy show, clad in constant overdoses of glamour. Larger than life, many would say. I say, the basic realities of life are merely enhanced by fashion, design and fabulosity. Reality is still very much present, as an artery running through huge, perfectly decorated Manhattan apartments, endless clothing and shoes, a "perfect" gay wedding headlined by Liza Minnelli, and all-expense-paid jaunt to Abu Dhabi. "Sex And The City 2" cakes on these "fabulous" escapist elements that no doubt draw in the audience. At the same time, the film faithfully adheres to the very real, human challenges known as life.

Beyond the glitzy couture and bottomless cocktails, come the true and tested dynamics of relationships. What works, and what does not? Does it work for Carrie to pout when her gift is a plasma TV in the bedroom, then force her husband to walk a red carpet with her when he just wants to unwind from a hard day? Does it work for Charlotte to feel threatened by, and then obsess over, her hot nanny sans bra? Does it work for Miranda to work too much, at the expense of her family time? Does it work for Samantha to ignore the laws and customs of a country in which she is a guest?

The answer to all of these questions is: No.

It's these "No's" that make the film and drive the storylines forward, and it's these same "No's" that speak to us.

We the audience, at least those of us who are longtime, faithful SATC fans, are admittedly pulled in by the "big show." But then we're ultimately left to reflect on the overall messages and lessons these characters put forth. While "Sex And The City 2" plainly teeters between fantasy and reality, it's the film's more realistic moments that give us pause and perhaps leave us asking ourselves what we might do in any of these gals' personal circumstances.

Should I really leave a job I've worked so hard to achieve? Will parenthood "break" me? Will predictability frighten me? Will age change or slow me down? Some questions are more easily answered than others, but many of them carry large doses of life-reflecting reality.

And then we're back to the fantasy: How likely is it that I'll randomly bump into an ex of mine, in a country I've never been to before, half way around the world? I'd call this a serious stretch. But let's just go with the fantasy: I've run into my ex, one who left me heart-broken and scarred no less, half way around the world. Now we teeter back to reality: What is my reaction to this encounter? How do I feel about seeing him, and what kind of time am I now going to give him, if any? Where am I now in my life, today, versus the place I was in with him several years ago? While time has moved me forward, how far forward have I really come? Am I far enough ahead to be "safe" from my past, or am I in danger of falling backward?

So describes the scenario of Carrie happening upon Aidan in Abu Dhabi. We see the potential of what could happen here, given Carrie's current marital frustrations and overall fears of the disappearing "sparkle" in her daily married life. Had the years since Aidan moved her far enough forward to be in a "safe" place to handle this chance encounter, or did Aidan possibly still have a deeply buried hold on her? Either way, it was blatantly put to her, Carrie was "playing with fire," as Charlotte blatantly let her know.

Ultimately, Carrie knew right from wrong, even as she walked a fine line. And where she did wrong, she knew she had to, in the way that worked for her despite her girlfriends' input, make right. This is a purely human situation in any form, apart from the fantasy elements that adorn it. It's pure reality such as this that we take with us and apply to our own lives. And when we do, Carrie just might not seem all that fictitious of a character.

The overall storyline of "Sex And The City 2" certainly had its weaknesses, and by the end of the film the activity had completely unraveled and suspended all logical believability. Once Samantha got arrested for a Muslim standard of lewd conduct, and after the girls' free luxuries were revoked, the plot seemed to steer itself into utter mayhem. Suddenly they were facing huge expenses they did not bargain for, and they needed to get out of Abu Dhabi and back to the U.S. fast. Of course there had to be more last-minute insanity heaped onto an already ridiculous situation, as Carrie launched herself into a feverish, spontaneous search for her missing passport. In the end, after disguising themselves in Muslim garb to avoid recognition by shady locals who were after them, they were safely on their plane. Moments later, they were home in New York. And the question remained, at least in my own mind: "How the hell did they really get to go on this "fantasy trip" in the first place? Is Samantha really that persuasive, while also so easily capable of ruining it all? Again, back to the fantasy we go, in order to absorb and tolerate it all.

In the end, we the audience are left with snapshots of these four girls at the most recent stages of their lives. Time has moved each of them forward.