

‘The Secret Life of Pets’ Neuters Promising Cast

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 8, 2016 - 7:31am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – A promising voice cast of comedy greats is effectively neutered in the blasé animated family film “The Secret Life Of Pets.” It doesn’t have the multi-layered story of the best Pixar movies – or even the “Despicable Me” films – to satisfy both kids and grownups. The bigger it tries to be, the more exhausted it seems.

The film might have worked best as a short subject, but it simply doesn’t have enough ideas to sustain a full length animated film. It’s early scenes are the ones most likely to get your tale wagging – where we witness dogs, cats, birds, and other assorted animals in a New York City apartment building indulging themselves while their owners are away. They’re either nibbling on leftovers, partying with other dogs, going on walks or chasing squirrels. It’s the kind of thing that will amuse young viewers, and is kind of blandly palatable to parents trying to catch a breather in a darkened theater.



Louis C.K. is the Voice of Max in ‘The Secret Life of Pets’

Photo credit: Universal Studios

Louis C.K. takes the voice lead as Max, a terrier pound puppy who loves nothing more than to just hang out with his owner. His simple life gets upended when his owner brings home a big scruffy mass of a dog named Duke (voiced by Eric Stonestreet). From there the film abandons its simple plot and sends its uneasy buddy team onto a madcap race into the New York City sewers while dodging animal control and running into a murderous gang of discarded pets.

In all this there’s really no place for Louie’s comedy sensibilities to shine through. He plays it mostly straight, and doesn’t really bring much of his sardonic wit to what is really a more hopeful and optimistic role – it’s difficult to understand why they even cast him. When the realization sinks in that it’s actually him doing the voice, I was left waiting for Louis C.K. brand of humor, but that never materialized.

The talented voice cast includes Jenny Slate, Hannibal Buress, Ellie Kemper, and a host of others, but the only ones who manage to make their comedic personas break through are Kevin Hart and Albert Brooks. Hart plays a vengeful former magician’s rabbit leading a ragtag army of discarded pets on a murderous rampage of revenge against the human race – and his hyperactive motor-mouthed schtick is only slightly more tolerable coming from an adorable big eyed bunny. Albert Brooks manages some of the film’s only true chuckles, in playing a self loathing hawk.



The Gang's All Here in 'The Secret Life of Pets'
Photo credit: Universal Studios

There are snakes, hamsters, crocodiles, and a multi-tattooed pig among a host of other characters in this tale – but its big set pieces are just frenetic without being frenetically entertaining. It’s zigging this way, and zagging the next, without really going anywhere. My four year-old twins liked it okay, but I’d say they were largely underwhelmed. It kept them quiet and watching the screen, but my son actually asked me if it was over yet, a full 15 minutes before finishing its trim 98 minute run time. I know exactly how he felt.

“The Secret Life of Pets” opens everywhere on July 8th, in 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D showings. Featuring the voices of Louis C.K., Kevin Hart, Jenny Slate, Hannibal Buress, Bobby Moynihan, Dana Carvey, Ellie Kemper, Lake Bell, Eric Stonestreet, Albert Brooks and Steve Coogan. Written by Cinco Paul, Ken Daurio and Brian Lynch. Directed by Yarrow Cheney and Chris Renaud. Rated “PG”



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