

THE SECRET LIFE OF PETS (2016)

- Rated PG for action and some rude humor
- \$75,000,000 budget
- 1 hr 27 min
- Directed by Yarrow Cheney, Chris Renaud
- Produced by Janet Healy, Christopher Meledandri, Robert Taylor
- The studio's fifth fully-animated feature

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Phil Svitek
- Marisa Serafini
- Stephanie Wenger

DEVELOPMENT

- Chris Meledandri, the founder and CEO of Illumination — the animation house behind *Despicable Me* and the mega-grossing *Minions* — is a dog-lover. He has two wire hair fox terriers
 - Chris Meledandri, the founder and CEO of Illumination Entertainment discusses the inception of *The Secret Life of Pets*: “The inspiration behind *Pets* was all of the pets that my family and I have owned since I was a little kid. We grew up with a cat and dogs and a bird, and what I realized as I became a parent was that we all invested these pets with rich emotional lives. Whenever we'd come home we would be thinking about the joy in their faces in seeing us and thinking about them doing things that were a little bit naughty. We realized we were asking exactly what they had done while we were out.”
- As the team built the story, they drew from experiences with their own pets. “The guinea pig is based on my guinea pig,” - Renaud
- Influences: *The New Yorker*: compiled books of dog and cat cartoons. *The Far Side* by Gary Larson
- The concept started with Chris Meledandri basically saying, ‘What about you doing a movie about what your pets do when you're not home?’ But from there, we had to develop our characters, our story; we built from there
- But what happened during the hours in between? That question led film producer Chris Meledandri to develop [The Secret Life of Pets](#)

WRITING (Cinco Paul, Ken Daurio, Brian Lynch)

- Bryan Lynch often types with one of his two dogs on his lap, hopes this attention to detail helps give a realistic feel to the characters and inspires viewers to love their animals just a little more — or rescue one
- As they pondered upon the setting, the duo was drawn to a New York apartment building. “Early on, we decided we wanted this story to take place in an apartment building,” Paul says. “That gave us access to a lot of pets and the idea that when the owners are away, they party. They gossip and drink out of the toilet; things they would never do if their owners were watching.”

STORY/CAST

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** comedy balance
 - **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** compare to something like Toy Story
 - **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** story
 - Having a large voice cast with busy schedules meant that each voice performance was recorded separately and the subtleties of each were combined in the editing
 - “There was some improvisation. I let the filmmakers decide how much improv they want to include, which is also the way it also works on ‘Modern Family.’ That’s why they hired me and the other actors, like Kevin Hart, Louis C.K. and Jenny Slate, as they wanted us to bring what we had to bear, and improvising is one of the things that we all bring.”
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- [Louis C.K.](#) as Max, a [Jack Russell terrier](#).^[8] He is quite fun-loving but is somewhat possessive of his owner Katie when Duke comes along.
 - [Eric Stonestreet](#) as Duke, a large, brown, shaggy [Newfoundland](#).^[8] He is at first reckless and inconsiderate, but is later shown to have a sympathetic backstory.
 - [Kevin Hart](#) as Snowball, a white [rabbit](#).^[8] Once abandoned by his magician owner, he went crazy, and leads a pack of other abandoned pets aiming to take revenge on humankind.
 - [Steve Coogan](#) as Ozone, a [Sphynx cat](#). He gangs up on Max and Duke when they are in his territory but is later interrogated by Gidget to disclose their whereabouts.
 - Steve Coogan also voices Reginald.
 - [Ellie Kemper](#) as Katie, Max and Duke's kind owner.^{[2][9]}
 - [Bobby Moynihan](#) as Mel, a hyperactive [Pug](#) and one of Max's friends.
 - [Lake Bell](#) as Chloe, an obese and apathetic grey [tabby cat](#)^[9] and one of Max's friends.
 - [Dana Carvey](#) as Pops, an elderly [Basset Hound](#),^[10] who is paralyzed in his back legs and helps Gidget and the pets find Max and Duke.
 - [Hannibal Buress](#) as Buddy, a laid-back [Dachshund](#)^{[9][11]} and one of Max's friends.
 - [Jenny Slate](#) as Gidget, a white [Pomeranian](#) who has romantic feelings for Max. She leads the pets to find Max and Duke.
 - [Albert Brooks](#) as Tiberius, a grumpy [red-tailed hawk](#)^{[9][11]} who helps Gidget and the pets find Max and Duke.
 - [Tara Strong](#) as Sweet Pea, a small [parakeet](#) pet and one of Max's friends.
 - [Chris Renaud](#) as Norman, a [guinea pig](#) who keeps getting lost trying to find his apartment.
 - [Michael Beattie](#) as Tattoo, a dim-witted tattooed [pig](#) who is one of Snowball's minions.
 - [Sandra Echeverría](#) as Maria, a character in a telenovela Gidget watches.
 - [Jaime Camil](#) as Fernando, a character in a telenovela Gidget watches.
 - Kiely Renaud as Molly.
 - [Laraine Newman](#) as Chloe's owner.
 - [John Kassir](#) as Leonard's owner.

LOUIS C.K. (Max)

- “This role always made sense to me, which is why I decided to do it. Max is a dog who lives in New York City, and I also live in New York,” the Emmy Award-winning writer explained. “You have this tension with your little home, because everyone’s apartment is

small and intimate in the chaos of the giant city. So I always understood Max in that way.”

ERIC STONESTREET (Duke)

- Duke, a large, brown, shaggy [Newfoundland](#)

KEVIN HART (Snowball)

- They showed me a picture of the bunny, where he was very nice and adorable. Then they flipped the page, and he was grabbing his ears, and his eyes were angry,” Hart explained. “They said, ‘Kevin, we want you to bring your personality to this bunny. Bring your cute and cuddly side, but at the same time, make it believable that he can start a revolution, and have other animals follow him.’ So I jumped at the opportunity.”
- “This is my first animated film, and nothing gets you more excited for it than seeing that your character has two sides,” the comedian revealed.
- Snowball is “very insecure. While he’s the leader, there is a strong sense of doubt in everything he does. With every order he gives, there’s a question behind it; he asks, ‘Was that too much? Do you guys get that?’ That’s something that Chris and I spoke about, because we wanted to ground the character. If the bunny only has one note, he wouldn’t be fun to track.” - Hart

JENNY SLATE (Gidget)

- Marcel the Shell With Shoes On, Bellwether in “Zootopia, Manipulative teen on “Bob’s Burgers, Harley Quinn in the forthcoming Lego Batman movie.
- I wanted Gidget to sound like candy sounds. Like the crinkle of a wrapper or the sweetness of saltwater taffy.
- I spend a lot of time observing my dog Reggie, because I truly am bonded and obsessed with him.

ALBERT BROOKS (Tiberius)

BOBBY MOYNIHAN

- [Bobby] thinks “that whoever decided that I should audition for this thought I kind of looks like him a little bit. I also think I’m a hyper-energetic person sometimes,” which reflects the pug’s personality, and “that comes across on screen.”

LAKE BELL (Chloe)

- “I play a cat, and I don’t know many cats, personally. I don’t have many dear friends who are cats. But in playing this cat, I have learned a lot about the cat community. I discovered that their complexity makes them great.”
- “When I looked at Chloe [for the first time] in that early picture and saw her round build and smug face, I thought, I understand the game.”

EASTER EGGS / TRIVIA

- This is Albert Brook’s fourth animated movie. The first three are [Finding Nemo](#) (2003), [The Simpsons Movie](#) (2007) and [Finding Dory](#) (2016)
- This is Steve Coogan’s third animated movie, and the third Illumination Entertainment feature for him. The first two are [Despicable Me 2](#) (2013) and [Minions](#) (2015)

- This is Kevin Hart's second time playing a villain associated with a bunny. He last played a villain named "Big Bunny" in "Fools Gold."
- This is Jenny Slate's third animated film. She previously voiced Bellwether in Disney's Zootopia (2016) and the mom in Dr. Seuss' The Lorax (2012)
- Gidget's owners are modeled after Louis C.K., who voices Max in the film, and Ellen DeGeneres
- The song the white poodle was playing on the stereo after its owner had left was "Bounce" by System of a Down
- In the house filled with cats, you can see the news reporter from Despicable Me on the TV
- On the back of the bus Snowball is riding in the trailer there is a poster for the film Sing an upcoming Illumination entertainment film also coming out in 2016
- In the telenovela 'The Passions of Passion' the male character Fernando is voiced by Jaime Camil, who currently plays Rogelio, a telenovela star best known for his role in 'The Passions of Santos' in 'Jane the Virgin (2014)'
- The license plate of the New York City Animal Control truck says "GOTCHA 3"
- Universal corporate synergy is high in this film. Billboards for NBC Universal properties "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" and "Saturday Night Live" can be seen on buildings outside the apartment building. A poster for Universal's upcoming animated movie "Sing" can be seen on the back of a metro bus
- A scene shows a cab driver listening to his radio, which is playing "Happy" by Pharrell Williams. This was one of the songs from "Despicable Me 2" - another Illumination Entertainment film

DIRECTING (Yarrow Cheney, Chris Renaud)

- **RENAUD:** Renaud's art career began as a humble graphic designer in the sports entertainment industry where he created mascots for the NFL, NBA, and Foot Locker, and he later worked as a comic book artist at Marvel and DC. He switched to designing children's shows like *Bear in the Big Blue House* and *It's a Big Big World*, and eventually landed as a story artist at Blue Sky Studios, where he met Meledandri, then-president of 20th Century Fox Animation.
- Director Renaud explains what drew him to the film: "What I wanted to do was to portray pets in this very contemporary way. I also liked playing with this funny, very real idea that when you leave your dog, even if you come back 20 seconds later, they act like you've been gone for 24 hours. They're so thrilled to see you, and their short-term memory doesn't quite work. That's how we play Max, who sees Katie through that lens in his own life. She's the center of his universe, and he expects that's how she feels as well...until she brings home this other dog."
- Co-director Cheney discusses his inspiration: "Every animal has their own personality, and there is so much humor in that. They aren't people, but it feels that way. To have the opportunity to capture that in film is what spoke to me, especially as a pet owner. When we leave for work or school in the morning, we are essentially handing over the keys to our pets. It is now their place, and for this universe we imagine that they have their own daily routines, just like humans."
- While so many films with animals anthropomorphize them, the team knew it was crucial that the characters maintain their animal characteristics so that the audience would relate to them as pets. "What I wanted very early on in the animation style was to make the animals...animals, and not depict them in a wholly anthropomorphic way," provides

Renaud. “When we look at animation problems, we would ask each other, ‘How does he get from point A to point B? How does she spin around or lift her paw.’” That extended to more complex scenes. “For instance, we have a moment where a few dogs hear something that sounds like somebody’s in trouble. But they’re instantly distracted by a butterfly flying by and run off in the other direction.”

- Cheney elaborates: “Our goal was to have the audience look at the actions of these animals and think that is something their own pet would do. Instead of a film where the animals are wearing clothes and walking around on two legs, we wanted to make our animals act like animals.”

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY

- Storyboard Artists: 2 of them. “Yarrow Cheney & I [Renaud] would work remotely with the storyboard artists—call them on the phone, or very often what I’d do is highlight a panel in the delivered PDF of panels and say can you add this or there’s some [dialogue] changes and that kind of thing.” - Renaud
- With the cast scattered around the U.S., and Illumination Entertainment production offices in both Santa Monica, Calif., and Paris, Renaud says he often directed via Skype, encouraging each actor to find his or her inner animal. “What’s it sound like when you’re eating a big bowl of kibble?” Renaud recalls coaching Stonestreet, who learned to pant, lick and growl.
- Guillon walks us through his process: “As the production designer and character developer, my role is to simultaneously design the characters as well as create the general outline for the environment of Pets. I mapped out the visuals of the film, and oversee the creation.”
- The film’s heads of character animation, Julien Soret and Jonathan del Val, discuss the look of the characters and their development style. From Soret: “The peculiar look of the movie is based on stylized breeds of dogs that are recognizable. The directors wanted these recognizable breeds so people could see their own pets in the movie.”

ANIMATION

- **Research:** When dogs climb a ladder, they’re very ungainly and awkward at it. They sort of hop. And it was that kind of stuff that we’d always try to push ourselves to find the solution that felt more true, or more based in how a dog or a cat or a bird would actually complete that certain action
- To fill the movie with moments pet lovers would relate to, the creative team first spent hours talking over personal animal experiences and collected anecdotes from friends and family to include in the story. They also brought dogs into the studio to study the rapport between large and small breeds. Animators tried to re-create the movement and attitude of actual pets instead of attaching human traits to cartoon animal bodies
- Real animals, including personal pets, inspired the look and behavior of animated characters in *The Secret Life of Pets*, say the filmmakers, who hoped to enrich the story and bring dimension and authenticity to the animation.
 - Meledandri’s terriers influenced the look of the character Max, a terrier mix. “I think I found myself not consciously pushing (the character design of) Max towards a terrier but kind of unconsciously pushing Max towards a terrier,” he says.

- Norman, the lost and confused guinea pig in the film, was inspired by Renaud's roving pet gerbils and guinea pigs who always seem to disappear from their cages — and reappear in the strangest places.
- Tiberius, the lonely bird of prey voiced by Albert Brooks, is based on the hawks in New York City, Renaud says, particularly a red-tailed hawk named Pale Male that once nested on a Fifth Avenue building near Central Park.
- One of the items that the director, co-director and producers focused upon was honing the performances from the characters in the background. When they discussed acting, they didn't talk about it in terms of voice acting, rather about what the actors and the animators brought to the characters. It was mandatory to find personalities expressed not just in the character who seizes the center of the scene, but the characters who are on the periphery as well
- Lighting supervisor Thierry Noblet discusses his role in *Pets* as one of translation: "As the lighting supervisor, my job was to lead my team to translate drawings from the artistic department into the 3D world. Our goal was to keep the beautiful pictures that the artists gave us, and keep the accuracy of light in those images."

EDITING (Ken Schretzmann)

- Having a large voice cast with busy schedules meant that each voice performance was recorded separately and the subtleties of each were combined in the editing. "Editor Ken Schretzmann (*Toy Story 3*) did an amazing job putting it together. I think it's impossible to tell that they're not together in the same room," Renaud adds

SOUND/MUSIC (Alexandre Desplat)

- *Harry Potter*, *Argo*, and *Moonrise Kingdom* to *The Imitation Game*, *The King's Speech*, and *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, *Rise of the Guardians* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*
- "[Director] Chris Renaud showed me some excerpts of the film and they were so funny and beautifully shot that I was already excited, and then we had a chat about music and very quickly we realized that we could go to a territory which I've not really explored in movies in America, which is jazz meeting orchestra"- Desplat
- "Another inspiration of mine was Carl Stalling and Scott Bradley, who scored cartoons in the '50s and '60s," continues Desplat. "I ended up being very, very obsessed for many years in trying to find a movie that could bring me to write in that spirit. And here it was!"
- An animation movie requires work on the sound and music which is more important than a live-action movie because it's non-existing persons...you have to create life! And music, in that sense, is very important," he explains. "There's also a lot of music, surely, and maybe sometimes much more than a drama or a comedy. And it's a very detailed type of work. Every single entry, every single move and motion of the characters, must go with music."
- In December 2015, it was announced that [Alexandre Desplat](#) would score the film
- Has contributed stunning sequences to films from *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Unbroken* and *The King's Speech* to both chapters of *Harry Potter* and the *Deathly Hallows*, was brought onto the production to provide a distinctive New York- inspired score for *The Secret Life of Pets*
- In the official trailer, one of the songs playing in it is "Downtown".
- Taylor Swift's "Welcome to New York" opens the film.

PROMOTION

- **PetSmart:** Toy line: Max, Duke, Chloe, Snowball, Gidget. "Store-takeover" campaign featuring the film's lovable characters in more than 1,400 stores throughout North America as well as on petsmart.com and other digital platforms.
- The Illumination Entertainment creative team of more than 100 artists has created 21 original content spots for the film's global promotional partners.
- **GoPro's:** original two-minute short, featuring a mix of real world athletes and animated characters, highlights this creative collaboration.
- **McDonalds:** *The Secret Life of Pets* will take over McDonald's restaurants worldwide with two custom animated television spots and an awesome Happy Meal campaign, including *The Secret Life of Pets* plush premiums and fun in-restaurant décor globally.
- **Chrysler:** Seth Meyers and his dog Frisbee are featured in the multi-platform campaign for the All-New 2017 Chrysler Pacifica. Additional celebrities, including Nick Cannon, take the wheel with their dogs in a series of humorous spots featuring scenes from *The Secret Life of Pets*.
- Not only has the studio been putting out ads, teasers, and trailers for a year, but it also made a promotional partner of nearly every pet-related event over the past 12 months, including the Puppy Bowl and the Westminster Dog Show. (Also the Stanley Cup playoffs and NBA playoffs)
- The film is accompanied by a short film entitled *Mower Minions*
- The movie's clever trailers have attracted more than 36 million views, a fact filmmakers believe shows broad appeal and the potential to reach beyond the children's market to the 65 percent of U.S. households that own pets
- Jenny Slate made first appearance with boyfriend Chris Evans at the premiere for the film

BOX OFFICE

- Domestic Summary
 - Opening Weekend: \$104,352,905
(#1 rank, 4,370 theaters, \$23,879 average)
- Widest Release: 4,370 theaters
- In Release: 6 days / 0.9 weeks
- The film's debut is the sixth-best all-time opening for an animated film, and the best opening ever for an original animated film, beating the previous-record holder, Pixar's *Inside Out*, which launched with \$90.4m last year.
<http://www.cartoonbrew.com/box-office-report/secret-life-pets-breaks-record-original-animated-film-debut-141490.html>
- The first film to open over \$100 million in the United States that is not a sequel nor based on previously published material

RECEPTION

- IMDB: 6.8
- RT: Tatometer 74%; 69% Audience
- CINEMASCOPE: A-
- Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* gave the film three out of four stars and called it "an animated fluffball-a sort of *Toy Story* with pets does everything to drive you crazy and ends up being totally irresistible."

SEQUELS

- Clearly, Universal has been betting on "Pets" to be its next big animation franchise. Before the film even opened, [the studio announced it was building a "Pets"-inspired theme park attraction](#)

FINAL THOUGHTS