

## 'Strays' repeats the same gross-out gags until the credits roll

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun  
Friday, 25 August 2023 05:25

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Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time:  
93 minutes

**This feature film from Universal Pictures will be playing exclusively in theaters on Friday, Aug. 18.**

Over the years, we've seen many family movies about cute talking animals. Often, the lead pooches are lost or must travel great distances to reach loved ones. What isn't nearly as common are hard R-rated efforts featuring adorable creatures getting into very adult situations. The new comedy *Strays* attempts to rectify this problem with a great deal of gross-out humor (more often than not involving bodily functions).

Admittedly, there are a handful of laughs in the picture thanks to the impressive voice cast, but the repetitive approach to the off-color material ultimately becomes tiring.

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The story begins with a cute Border Terrier named Reggie (voiced by Will Ferrell) describing his interactions with human master, Doug (Will Forte). Reggie adores Doug, but it’s immediately clear that his owner is horrible and abusive.

While playing a “game” in which the dog is left in the big city to fend for himself and find his own way home, the protagonist encounters a Boston Terrier named Bug (Jamie Foxx). Bug first explains to Reggie that he has actually been abandoned by his cruel owner and then shows him how to survive on the streets. The new pal also introduces Reggie to his chums, Australian Shepherd Maggie (Isla Fisher) and Great Dane Hunter (Randall Park). Finally understanding how poorly he has been treated, Reggie asks the gang to help him return home and take revenge on Doug.

As mentioned, the humor is blunt and very R-rated. There are some amusing bits early on as the innocent Reggie misinterprets all of the over-the-top, awful statements and actions of Doug (even incorporating his owner’s frequent curse as part of the name of a “game” they play together) as loving affectations. And stray Bug has some entertaining lines early on, frankly explaining both the harsh reality of life as a stray and the feeling of freedom in being able to do literally anything they want.

There’s also a very brief but comical bit involving the sudden appearance of a “narrator dog” unwantedly delivering flowery prose about the life of his human keeper to the protagonists. It quickly veers off in a dark direction and, in the process, effectively pokes fun at a movie trope. But while one would hope for more sequences riffing and indelicately making fun of cliches from popular animal-themed movies, the opportunity is largely squandered.

Instead, the screenplay has an episodic structure, with a lot of repetitive jokes telegraphed well in advance of the payoff. Even worse, the majority of segments focus on scatological and/or bodily function humor.

Relatable witticisms involving the subject can generate laughter. Unfortunately, just about every scene involves a smelly turd and/or characters mounting inanimate objects, or at the very least verbal references to such acts. By the midway point, seeing the movie duplicate the same kind of gag becomes exhausting.

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And the movie’s increasing desire to shock eventually leads to a screen literally filled with feces and a character being covered in waste. It’s certainly gross, but not particularly sharp or uproarious.

Even the exaggerated, farcical-sounding revenge plot doesn’t amuse when Reggie actually locates Doug and the two face off. The human character turns so nasty and violent that frankly it isn’t fun to witness the big showdown or what occurs afterward. Instead, it all falls rather flat.

The visual effects in the movie are impressive. It’s easy to suspend disbelief as all the animals converse and there are a few chuckles courtesy of the delivery by the talented cast. But the screenplay lets the performers down. *Strays* doesn’t offer any surprises and repeats the same gross-out gags until the credits roll. There isn’t really enough material here to sustain a feature film and viewers are unlikely to be howling with laughter at this misguided effort.

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