

'DC League of Super-Pets' a family-friendly spin on superhero lore

By Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

The DC Comics Cinematic Universe has mostly taken a dark, gritty approach to blockbuster comic book movies. But perhaps there's another way to explore the world of the Justice League that's a bit more warm, cuddly and friendly? That's the thesis presented by the animated movie "DC League of Super-Pets," which combines several elements that have already proven successful to create a family-friendly access point to the worlds of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman and their gang of superheroes.

"DC League of Super-Pets" is written by Jared Stern and John Whittington, who have writing credits on "The Lego Ninjago Movie" and "The Lego Batman Movie." The film is directed by Stern, who also directed the 2018 rom-com "Happy Anniversary," and is co-directed by Sam Levine, who brings the animation experience. The voice cast is packed with favorite comedy actors, including Kate McKinnon, Vanessa Bayer, Natasha Lyonne, Jemaine Clement, John Early and Marc Maron.

But most importantly, it teams Dwayne Johnson and Kevin Hart in the lead roles of Krypto the Super-Dog and Ace, a rescue mutt. Johnson and Hart have had



Dwayne Johnson as Krypto and John Krasinski as Superman in "DC League of Super-Pets."

Courtesy Warner Bros. Pictures

quite the success in their odd couple pairing in films such as "Central Intelligence" and "Jumanji," and "DC League of Super-Pets" relies on their lively banter to sell the enemies-to-friends story at the center of the film.

Stern and Whittington's script imagines a world in which a young Kal-El (who later becomes Superman and his alter ego, Clark Kent, voiced by John Krasinski) has a stowaway puppy in the pod that blasts off from the planet Krypton. Boy and pup grow up together into man and dog, saving the world together in Metropolis. But when Krypto starts to become jealous of Lois Lane (Olivia Wilde), Clark wonders about finding his best friend his own best friend.

That quandary resolves itself when a hairless guinea pig named Lulu (McKinnon), rescued from an animal testing lab

run by Lex Luthor (Maron), and obsessed with world domination, uses a shard of orange kryptonite to grant herself and the other rescue animals superpowers. Krypto has to team up with the motley crew of Ace, pig PB (Bayer), elderly turtle Merton (Lyonne) and a chipmunk named Chip (Diego Luna) to save Superman and the Justice League, who have been captured by the gang of super-powered guinea pigs.

While the plot following Krypto finding his pack and saving the day is exceedingly formulaic and slightly tiresome to endure with its predictable turns, Stern and Whittington fill the space around the structure with a plethora of absurdist humor and sharply written jokes, as well as the teasing self-awareness that marked both "The Lego Batman Movie" (arguably the best deconstruction of the Batman myth) and "The Lego Ninjago Movie."

McKinnon's performance of the megalomaniacal Lulu proves to be one of the funniest in the film, while Lyonne's Merton is a sleeper breakout.

"DC League of Super-Pets" isn't trying to break down the genre or trouble the already well-established world, but rather, find some wiggle room to play with the familiar characters and insert some child-like wonder and earnestness. Both cutesy and comic, this animated film finds a way for kids and families to experience these well-known characters, but older DC fans will enjoy the references to their beloved comic book tales too. It's a funny and sweet refresh on the DC lore that should please fans old and new.

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