

# Ultimate fun for all



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

2 Mar 2016

In its 92-year history, Walt Disney Animation Studios has created a long and storied legacy of talking animal films - from Mickey Mouse's debut short Steamboat Willie to Bambi, Dumbo, The Jungle Book, Robin Hood and The Lion King, and returns to the wild with the feature film Zootropolis, which marks Disney Animation Studios' 55th animated feature.

"We all grew up watching the great Disney animal films - we were immersed in those worlds," says director Byron Howard. (Tangled, Bolt), who directed the film with Rich Moore (Wreck-It Ralph, The Simpsons), from a screenplay by co-director Jared Bush (Penn Zero: Part-Time Hero) and Phil Johnston (Wreck-It Ralph, Grimsby).

"My favourite childhood film was Robin Hood - and we wanted to honour that legacy, but in a new and different way that dives even deeper. We started by asking: What would a mammal metropolis look like if it were designed by animals? The idea was incredibly exciting to us."



The modern mammal metropolis of Zootropolis is a city like no other. Comprising habitat neighbourhoods like ritzy Sahara Square and frigid Tundratown, it's a melting pot where animals from every environment live together - a place where no matter what you are, from the biggest elephant to the smallest shrew, you can be anything. But when rookie Officer Judy Hopps (voice of Ginnifer Goodwin) arrives, she discovers that being the first bunny on a police force of big, tough animals isn't so easy. Determined to prove herself, she jumps at the opportunity to crack a case, even if it means partnering a fast-talking, scam artist fox, Nick Wilde (voice of Jason Bateman), to solve the mystery.

## A buddy movie

"At its core, Zootropolis is a buddy movie," says director Rich Moore. "Judy and Nick - a rabbit and a fox - are natural enemies by definition. So these characters don't exactly get along at first. They come to the relationship with ideas about each other - beliefs that aren't informed or accurate."



According to Howard, the fact that the buddies don't get along fuels the film's comedy. "Judy is the eternal optimist who believes anyone can be anything - it's the city's motto, after all," he says. "Nick is the complete opposite. He's a cynic. He believes we are what we are. So we put this country bumpkin who's full of vim and vigour in the middle of the big city alongside Nick - the realist - and he gets to have a lot of fun messing with her. But she has a few tricks up her sleeve."

Filmmakers conceived and built the vast and detailed world of Zootropolis, populating it with 64 different species of animals that retain what makes each animal so amazing in the real world - but these animals talk and wear pants.

"The team spent 18 months just researching animals," says producer Clark Spencer. "We met animal experts from all over the world, including Disney's Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World. We travelled 9000 miles to Kenya for a two-week deep dive into animal personality and Behaviour. We wanted each species of animal to be real, to feel authentic and to be based on their real-world Behaviour."



## Changed by our trip to Africa

"I think all of us were profoundly changed by our trip to Africa," adds Jared Bush, who is co-director and one of the screenwriters. "It's such an amazing experience, being around hundreds, thousands of animals. In this movie, we want to feel that density, which is a lot of work. We came back after that trip with a sincere need to make it right."

Research is the foundation for all of Walt Disney Animation Studios' films - something executive producer John Lasseter believes is required to create a great story. So when the filmmakers behind Zootropolis decided to create an all-animal world, they went wild, literally, when it came to research. In addition to their trek to Africa, team members spent time at Disney's Animal Kingdom and San Diego's Wild Animal Park; they interviewed several experts and visited the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. "We did about 18 months of really solid research into animals," says director Byron Howard. "We studied how they interact in the wild, how they socialise and how their individual communities are built in the natural world."



“We found that the majority of animals – 90% - percent—are prey,” continues Howard. “Only 10% are predators. So while we always assumed that predators ruled the animal world, they’re actually the minority. We talked to anthropologists and sociologists and took a look way back through human history - any time you have a majority and minority, social issues arise. We learned and observed that animals of all kinds tend to stay with animals that look like them; they find refuge and protection within their individual groups and tend to avoid animals that are different.”

So the research led the filmmakers to a story that deals with stereotypes and bias. “We set out to make a funny animal movie,” says Howard. “But the more digging we did, we saw an opportunity to talk about something important, while still having great fun with the world, the characters and the story.”

## Prey versus predator

According to head of story Josie Trinidad, filmmakers first looked at prey versus predator and how that would affect a community like Zootropolis. “Then we leaned into animal stereotypes - elephants never forget, foxes are sly, rabbits are timid - everyone has a stereotype they’re fighting against. That’s something everyone in the audience can appreciate.”

Filmmakers strived to strike the right balance in the story. “We worked very hard to find that sweet spot,” says director Rich Moore. “The goal from the beginning was to tell a very rich story that’s entertaining, has heart and says something meaningful.”

*Five lucky Bizcommunity readers can win a Zootropolis hamper that includes a notebook, postcard set, T-shirt and cap. All you have to do is tell us who plays the bunny and send your answer and contact details to [daniel@writingstudio.co.za](mailto:daniel@writingstudio.co.za) before 31 March, 2016*

Read more about Zootropolis and other new films opening on 4 March at [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

- 3 new local films and more at cinemas this May - 29 Apr 2024
- Get ready for some great escapism in cinemas this April - 3 Apr 2024
- What to expect at the cinema this March - 27 Feb 2024
- Oscar fever brews: Here's what's at the cinemas this February - 29 Jan 2024
- Top 10 films of 2023 - 28 Dec 2023

[View my profile and articles...](#)



For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>