



First look review

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Review

Zootopia review – Disney's furry fable gets its claws out for the bigots

★★★★☆

Predators and prey learn to get along in this animated tale of species coexistence – until a stray comment from the bunny-cop heroine turns the whole place into a hate-filled Trump rally

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An anthropomorphized hippopotamus in a business suit will always be welcome. To that end, Disney's Zootopia (Zootropolis in the UK, but Zoomania in Germany – make of these permutations what you will) has solid protection from criticism baked in. From enormous elephants to zippy voles, all creatures great and small are dressed in funny outfits and, thanks to some very expensive computers, doing adorable things. A stoner yak voiced by [Tommy Chong](#)? It takes a concentrated effort to not at least chuckle. Luckily there's just enough of a story here to keep the over-eight set engaged once the novelty wears off.

The world of Zootopia is one with no humans. All animals live together in basic tolerance. Predators have had the savagery bred out of them, so a lion can be near a sheep and everyone is chill. This isn't to say there isn't residual prejudice. "Just because he *happened* to be a fox" is a phrase a young Judy Hopps (Ginnifer Goodwin) reminds her provincial bunny parents when they bring up a touchy moment from her childhood.

Zootopia Official US Trailer #2



◀ Watch a trailer for Zootopia

Judy is an idealist and, thanks to the mayor's Mammal Inclusion Initiative, the first bunny to graduate from the police academy. Soon she's zooming away from the farmlands to the gleaming city of Zootopia, where "anyone can be anything", but she still needs to remind a well-meaning but [microaggressive](#) cheetah that "only a bunny can call another bunny cute".

The city itself is the best part of the picture, a gorgeous melange of design elements. Its center has a touch of [Futurama](#), but there's also Sahara Square, Tundratown, the Rainforest District and Little Rodentia. That last bit is especially funny, because when even tiny Judy Hopps is racing through it she looks like Godzilla stomping on Tokyo.

Judy's zealous nature gets her in trouble with the police chief ([Idris Elba](#), voicing a giant water buffalo), but he shouldn't be selling her short and sticking her with meter-maid duty. Naturally she's the one that's going to crack the case of the 14 missing mammals.



◀ Mayor Lionheart (JK Simmons) and Assistant Mayor Bellwether (Jenny Slate). Photograph: Disney/AP

She doesn't do it alone, though. She ensnares Nick Wilde, a conniving sly fox (voiced by [Jason Bateman](#)) to help her, and when they work together and overcome their bigotry, there are life lessons blazing off the screen. But here's where Zootopia gets a little interesting. There's a natural endpoint to the story when the bad guy gets captured, but there's a twist. I wouldn't normally get into such late-in-the-game story details, but there's really not much else meriting discussion beyond hissing at the painfully

drawn-out parody of [The Godfather](#), or applauding the we're-going-to-annoy-you humor at the sloth-run Department of Mammal Vehicles.

The missing mammals are being held because for some reason they have reverted to their savage states, and have committed unpredictable (PG-rated) atrocities. Judy says some problematic things during a press conference and, within moments, the bliss of Zootopia's utopia is shattered. Soon society devolves into an enormous Trump rally, with an unhelpful press corps fanning the flames of xenophobia and ignorance.



📷 Judy Hopps with Nick Wilde, voiced by Jason Bateman, at the Department of Mammal Vehicles. Photograph: Disney/AP

Woe be to anyone who tries to argue a one-to-one comparison between the predators v prey theme and any real-life controversy. It flashes on everything from typical rightwing radio clichés to general false-flag paranoia. It's somewhat heavy material for a film aimed at children, but perhaps very necessary in an age where a beer-stained uncle might have ruined Thanksgiving wearing a Make America Great Again baseball cap.

It's still Disney, though, and it concludes happily and without much nuance. There's ample space given for prey like Judy to apologize to unjustly accused predators (like her fox buddy), and for everyone to grow. It's a good message, and one that will no doubt infuriate the right, who will say that Disney spent however many millions producing propaganda in favor of, for instance, the Iran deal – to pull one of a hundred different interpretations out of my ear. That this cute picture with funny giraffes and gazelles will be manipulated to further fuel hate is just all the more evidence that we haven't yet fully evolved beyond our savage animal state.

Zootopia is released in the US on 4 March and as Zootropolis in the UK on 25 March.

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