

‘Zootopia’ goes out on a limb – perhaps too far away from the tree

Written by By David Pinson For the Sun
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«« out of 4 stars

You will notice quite early in the new Disney cartoon movie *Zootopia* that it is doesn't play much like a Disney cartoon movie at all. The Forever Used Disney Formula is pretty much gone; at least the songs are nixed and there isn't a single princess to be found. Of course if you look deep enough the film still follows the 4 step template of: 1)Once upon a Time 2)The Plot Thickens 3)Time is Running Out and 4) They lived Happily Ever After- but so does just about every movie. Following the different beats set down by the last Disney Animation Studios film, *Big Hero 6*

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Zootopia
signifies a shift that is pretty profound.

But is it a good thing, this change? Is “different” to be mistaken with “better”? In this case *Zootopia* is refreshing but flawed and in need of some tightening. Too contemporary for its own good, the film will not be considered a classic. And classics are what the Forever Used Disney Formula usually guarantees. That's why they've used it forever.

Zootopia focuses on a young bunny named Judy Hopps (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin), who wants to be a cop more than anything. But you see in this world the “difficult” jobs are reserved for the lions and polar bears, the predators, and she must overcome prejudices and stereotypes to prove herself. There are some very pleasant positive messages for the kiddies here as the film really drives home the point that we can all be what we want to be. Work hard. Don't let people tell you something is impossible. Acceptance. Coexist. Um...be nice to bunnies? Good stuff. Standard stuff. But then there is another thematic element that is sure to cock an eyebrow or two.

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Judy is put on a case regarding a missing otter. She seeks the help of a sly fox to crack the case as she undercovers a conspiracy. You see, predators are reverting to their animal instincts, getting on all fours and attacking the innocent “prey” around them. They are, for some unknown reason, behaving like “savages” and causing terror. Of course the natural thing to do is to persecute *all* predators. Blame them all for the acts of a few. Get rid of the entire lot of them.

It does not take a very astute mind to see the parallels intended here. Replace the word “predator” with the word “Muslim” and you have a very interesting moral to the story. It’s a charged topic that feels very out of place in a movie leaning heavily on human-like sloths telling each other jokes. Regardless of personal view, this element is too heavy-handed in execution and really pulls the movie down in the third act.

There is also the issue of pace. The film meanders and loses urgency about half way through. At an hour and forty eight minutes some cuts should have been made.

Genuine laughs are tucked away in some bright spots of the film and the characters are likable enough. I’m interested in how the kids are going to react to a film that doesn’t seem to know its audience. Maybe eight to twelve year olds will enjoy it? The little ones will get bored, to be sure.

It’s nice to see Disney pushing the boundaries and not relying on formula to make the millions.

But deviating from the sure thing will naturally result in some misfires.

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