

# FILM REVIEW

## *Zootopia* *Everything in Motion*

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*Zootopia*, USA, 2016, produced by Clark Spencer, directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore, starring Ginnifer Goodwin and Jason Bateman, 1h 48m, distributed by Walt Disney Pictures.

We all want to live in Zootopia, with its moving, laughing, snapchatting mammals. The city articulates and maximizes interaction (in space, time, and multiplicity) to bring together climates, habitats, dimensions, and temporalities that would otherwise distance species. The miracle is a global society without the dissolution of the individual.

Like a theme park, its neighborhoods are separate ecosystems, including Tundra Town, Rainforest District, Sahara Square, Little Rodentia ... because, after all, we can't expect a polar bear to just live in the rainforest. But, of course, he can work in the central business district (CBD)—a central node that joins the climate-sensitive animal kingdoms for the daily nine-to-five grind. Total separation and desegregation of the differences would be simple; as easy as sprawl. However, it is equilibrium in tension, transportation, and movement that lubricates the friction between diverse habitats and their inherent discrepancies. The neighborhoods are linked with transit: funiculars, service tunnels, high-speed trains, and subways, and conflicts and resolutions emerge within these moving vessels. Concordantly, the structured circulation between the neighborhoods serves as a pact between the animals that would not have existed in their less-civilized era. Each local transaction—like a carnivorous polar bear royally carrying the tiny Godfather shrew—reflects universal agreements.

Our Zootopian host is idealistic bunny Judy Hopps: an emblem of urban speed and feminine power. Judy leaves the family carrot farm in Bunnyburrow to become the first bunny police officer set on serving and protecting the walking, talking, texting mammals of Zootopia. We watch her physical transformation: when the protagarabbit passes police training, she emerges with Usain Bolt's thighs and a Flashdance sweatshirt proudly showing her sports bra. The first Disney princess to show her undies mirrors Brandi Chastain's 1999 precautious goal victory slide that helped bear the twenty-first-century



woman. Her parents try to convince her to stay. Be like us, they emphasized: “We settled,” Mr. Hopps offers, followed with the best line of the film: “Oh, we settled *hard*.” His wife nods to the colorful prospects she once saw in her future.

Judy’s story as first bunny police officer, garnering awards, saving the day, and recruiting talent after being underestimated, starts on the train station platform, a tiny strip of Zootopia stretched out to shake hands with her rural hometown. When Judy hops onto the train, she’s in the arms of government—their plans, infrastructure, and timetable. As she alights, a mouse, beaver, and moose egress through three different-sized doors (Figure 1). Someone, some policy made sure that the subway was suited for the tiny-squeeky and the heavy-stompy. Judy immediately encounters a new, smooth rhythm of the rails; Shakira’s anthem unfolds as she is wonderstruck from the train’s bubble window, zooming into urbanity, anchored by the far-off futuristic skyscrapers in the CBD (Figure 2). At the train station, hippos dry off, gerbils in suits slide down their tubes. It’s clear that Zootopia has been had by planners, with its sidewalks, streetlights, signage, subway, and parking spots. The hallmark of the city, however, is the crowd. The city safeguards networked public spaces for the crowds: the street, the atrium, the park, and the plaza that are denser in activity than if owned privately. Overregulation (excess of law) would eliminate exchange, and deregulation (excessive laissez-faire) would result in turmoil. Instead, the accommodating city finds ways to make things work, like a juice bar with a pneumatic tube to reach giraffes. The city finds a degree of intervention that maximizes interrelation and makes services equitable.

Judy’s first job is handing out parking tickets to parked cars. She’s quick—a skill that brought her to the ZPD, and now she’s been saddled in a slow meter maid car. Meanwhile, other police are given giant gem-shaped rovers to find a



**Figure 1:** Different-sized creatures alighting on the platform show that transportation is for everyone.

Source: <http://www.delightful.life/zootopia-review> (© Walt Disney Pictures).



**Figure 2:** A train shuttles Judy from her country village to Zootopia.

Source: [http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/Zootopia\\_\(location\)](http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/Zootopia_(location)) (© Walt Disney Pictures).

set of missing nonthreatening yet predator-by-birth animals. Judy goes rogue to find the rogue animals—a real job. She enlists a fox sidekick, Nick Wilde, who protects his shady streetwise deals by helping Judy track down the missing animals. Judy and Nick match as mesoscale animals, signaling the everyman. They dine with tiny shrews and try not to get stomped on by giraffes. Like all of us, they are born into size but grow into scale. Judy's unlikely path leads her to live among animals that might be a six-sigma anomaly in Bunnyburrow but are of uniform distribution in Zootopia. Meanwhile, Nick makes a living, among other things, by profiting from the dimensional disparity; the inconsistency is somehow also economic. The gaps that open between the different scales of necessity are space for benefit.

The animals' differences in scale take on a new significance when in motion. Distances are absolute and shared by all—there is a single map of Zootopia. But when traversing these distances, animals' accessibility differs by their sizes, physical mobility capabilities, and modalities. Coexistence is made possible through the multiplicity of velocities. Speed is negotiated and finally dissolves the absolute value of distance. Distance incurs meaning only relative to the different types of movement in interaction. But, as opposed to the natural mediums from which species originate, the artifact of Zootopia eliminates the model by which the smaller have adapted to move faster, the larger slowed down by the laws of physics.

Meanwhile, Judy's hippity-hop, can-do attitude promises to sweeten the political machine of policy and government. A license plate clue takes them to the DMV, where slow-motion sloths eventually help find the limo used to

kidnap a predator. Judy and Nick visit different neighborhoods, traveling by foot and by sky to solve their crime. Together with the different cadences and gaits of the animal kingdom, these rhythms syncopate the city. Its inhabitants (and their idiosyncrasies) produce constant and reciprocal interruptions and disturbances that the city assimilates. The film communicates disharmonies of motion and speed with moving mammals and objects, sharp cuts, editing, and sound. Especially effective is the flip-book climate changes: from the ice to the jungle, the filmmakers have us shivering and sweating.

Clues lead Judy and Nick to publically expose a lab where a handful of captive predators have mysteriously degraded to beast status. The remainder of still-among-us predators comprises 10 percent of the population (including Mayor Lionheart) and are branded as biologically inclined to kill. When 10 percent of the population is accused of being wired for violence, echoes of racism against African Americans abound. Judy emerges as a downtrodden McCarthyist hero, only to return victorious after following an encore clue into the deep, dark tunnels of old, dead infrastructure: an abandoned subway tunnel and companion subway car. Illegal, shady activities are being performed in a bit of public transportation goods that have been discarded and amputated by the government. Zootopian mobilities are presented in the light and darkness, as good and evil.

Finally, the animal gaze gives viewers a new perspective on mobility. Industrial human cultures constantly try to outwit the body. We send messages to hundreds of people per day but only speak with a few. We travel faster than our legs could carry us—trying to leave behind the limitations of our bodies. In Zootopia, animals, not just humans, confront their mobility limitations. Zootopia's mobilities electrify animals to compete—to be bigger, better, faster, not as Darwin penned, but as humans do in their swirling, anxious cities. The unyielding, but perhaps equitable, nature of urban treadmill transportation is pronounced when tiny critters and giant leathery mammals ride together, all trying to keep up the pace of urban life.

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