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'Zambezia': 3D animation puts South Africa film in the picture

By Teo Kermeliotis, for CNN
July 26, 2012 -- Updated 1433 GMT (2233 HKT)



TRIGGERFISH ANIMATION

HIDE CAPTION

Adventures in Zambezia

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

"Zambezia" is a new South African 3D animation feature film

The movie stars the voices of Samuel L. Jackson, Jeremy Suarez and Jeff Goldblum

It has been chosen to close the 33rd edition of the Durban International Film Festival

"Zambezia" is targeted toward children aged five to 11

(CNN) -- He's got blue wings, an adventurous spirit and is poised to be the latest film star to come out of South Africa.

A high-spirited young falcon, Kai is the main character in "Zambezia," a new South African 3D animation film featuring an all-star voice cast, including Hollywood A-listers Samuel L. Jackson, Abigail Breslin, Jeff Goldblum, Leonard Nimoy and Jeremy Suarez.

Set in the majestic Victoria Falls and inspired by southern Africa's startling artwork, "Zambezia" is hoping to put South African animation on the map while entralling children around the world with its uplifting message of togetherness.

The movie, produced by Cape Town-based Triggerfish Animation Studios, has been selected as the closing film of the 33rd edition of the Durban International Film Festival, which runs until July 29.

"The film is a wonderful ambassador, in a way, of South Africa and I think as it travels the world it's going to spread the word about an industry that is young and vibrant and extremely talented," says "Zambezia" director and co-writer Wayne Thornley.

"In and of itself, I think it's just an enjoyable ride for children and they're going to come away wishing they could fly."

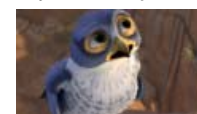
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3D film puts S. Africa in the picture

July 26, 2012 -- Updated 1433 GMT (2233 HKT)



He's got blue wings, an adventurous spirit and is poised to be the latest film star to come out of South Africa.

From the streets to break beats

July 19, 2012 -- Updated 1434 GMT (2234 HKT)

Everyone can relate to that idea that it's better, it's easier to do things together, that teams are just more vibrant and get more things done.

Wayne Thornley, "Zambezia" director

The movie, which is targeted toward children aged five to 11, [tells the story of Kai](#), an intrepid young falcon that's brought up by his strict father in an isolated outpost. His lonely life is turned upside down when a kooky bird crashes into his world and tells him of Zambezia -- a bustling bird city where "there's amazing food, music, sights and sounds."

A talented flier, Kai decides to leave his isolated upbringing behind him and explore life in Zambezia. He quickly realizes, however, that getting by in a city can be more difficult and demanding than living alone.

Yet, after joining Zambezia's air force and defending it from a band of marauding lizards, he also discovers the true values of teamwork and community sharing.

Thornley says the movie was guided by the traditional African principle of [ubuntu](#), which he describes roughly as "a person is a person only because of other people" -- he says that the movie's heartwarming theme will resonate with both African and international audiences.

"Everyone can relate to that idea that it's better, it's easier to do things together, that teams are just more vibrant and get more things done," he says. "They are difficult and messy and it's not always easy but it is worth it -- I think that's a universal theme and I hope that audiences around the world come away with that kind of message going: it's safer to stay alone but it's not better."

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The concept for the movie originated about seven years ago but production took just over two years to be completed. The third computer generated 3D film to be made in South Africa, "Zambezia" is "probably the biggest budget animated film ever to come out of anywhere in Africa," says Thornley -- Triggerfish was unable to disclose how much the film cost, but said its budget was under \$20 million.

The movie's international appeal is expected to be raised by the high-profile roster of actors lending their voices to the characters. Thornley says it all became possible after well-known U.S. producer Mace Neufeld saw the film by chance. "He liked what he saw and he finally got involved and started opening doors for us."

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Working with top Hollywood stars such as Jackson and Goldblum was "an honor" and "really fun", says Thornley.

"It was gratifying that they treated it seriously like any project," he says. "We tend to think of ourselves that we're this little studio but they were fantastic and it was really a great experience," he adds.

"Zambezia" had its world premiere at France's [Annecy Animation Festival](#) last month and was released in Israel earlier in July. It will hit the big screen in Germany and Switzerland on August 30, while its South Africa release is scheduled for December 26.

It has already been sold in more than 30 territories for screening in over 50 countries, including a distribution deal in English-speaking territories with Sony, according to Triggerfish Animation.

Thornley says South Africa's animation industry is still young and small but it is "definitely punching above its weight."

"I want people to sit back and have a fantastic time with the



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July 4, 2012 -- Updated 1211 GMT (2011 HKT)



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The film school in Kenya's biggest slum

June 5, 2012 -- Updated 1117 GMT (1917 HKT)



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May 28, 2012 -- Updated 1407 GMT (2207 HKT)

characters and have a fantastic insight into some of the amazing African landscapes that we've put into this film," says Thornley.

"But also I want them to come away really surprised that something like that could come out of Africa and South Africa in particular."

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