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Steve Moore draws on Idaho to bring 'Open Season' to life

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It wasn't the awe-inspiring Idaho landscape or Idaho's famous potatoes that motivated Boisean Steve Moore to come up with the story for a movie. Instead, he found his inspiration for the new film "Open Season" from the critters living outside of towns like Ketchum and McCall.

Moore, who has drawn the popular "In The Bleachers" syndicated comic for the past 21 years, read article after article about wild animals that became somewhat domesticated by living outside of resort towns.

These animals ultimately would hack off the folks that lived in town and be relocated into the nearby woods, where there were no overflowing Dumpsters to be found.

What happened to the animals after the disruption of their lives of luxury is the basis for "Open Season," Sony Pictures Animation's first full-length CGI film and the film that opened the 2006 Idaho International Film Festival on Thursday.

Moore, who developed the story idea with producing partner John Carls, is an executive producer of the new film.

The story, which revolves around Boog, a 900-pound grizzly bear (voiced by Martin Lawrence), and Elliot, a scrawny mule deer (voiced by Ashton Kutcher), came easily for Moore.

"I do so many hunting-related cartoons where it's actually the animals getting the better of the hunters," said Moore, whose "In The Bleachers" strip runs in more than 250 newspapers nationwide (including in the Idaho Statesman's sports section).

And although hunting is a topic Moore often touches on in "In The Bleachers," he's quick to point out that "Open Season" is not really a hunting movie.

"That's the third act," says Moore. "It's really about the relationship between Boog and Elliot."

With hunting season just three days away, Boog and Elliot must befriend the beasts of the forest where they have been relocated in order to survive. That forest is outside of a town called Timberline, which Moore says is a mix between Ketchum and McCall.

"Open Season" is the first feature-length film Moore has worked on after a number of TV scripts and animated shows, such as "Metalheads," a children's show bought by the BBC.

He has, however, always had an affinity for film.

"I'm not a slathering, stalk-the-actor type of guy," jokes the easy-going 52-year-old. "I've just always been fascinated with it."

Along with Carls, Moore also sold a script to Dreamworks Animation in 2000 that turned into the Aardman Animations (of Wallace & Gromit fame) movie "Flushed Away," which is expected to open in theaters this fall.

And Moore is working on the script for "Alpha & Omega," which he describes as an animated romantic comedy about the reintroduction of wolves into Idaho from Canada.

He shrugs off the fact that wolves could be a controversial issue for an animated film, just as he shrugs off a question about whether there's any pressure in producing the first animated film for a company whose sister division (Sony Pictures Imageworks) won an Oscar last year for best visual effects for "Spider-Man 2."

"My opinion is that they have so many good movies on their slate that are in production or pre-production that if 'Open Season' is respectable, they're going to be just fine," Moore says.

When he says "respectable," he is referring to "Open Season's" box office haul, the only thing that will matter to film executives after the movie opens nationwide today.

Moore has more important judges of the film on his mind -- his 8-, 10- and 12-year-old kids. "They've seen quite a few clips," says Moore. "What they've seen so far, they like. The early reviews are good."

Cutline: Boisean Steve Moore.