

coverstory

BY GEORGE DICKIE



"The Great North" premieres
Sunday on Fox.

A family contends with Alaska and one another in Fox's animated 'The Great North'

As animated family comedies set in Alaska go, Fox's "The Great North" is in a category all its own.

Premiering Sunday, Feb. 14 (following a January sneak peek), the half-hour comedy follows the adventures of the Tobin clan of the 49th State, which is headed by patriarch Beef (voice of Nick Offerman, "Parks and Recreation"), a single dad trying to keep his disparate group of kids together after his wife left him.

Probably the biggest oddball of them is daughter Judy (Jenny Slate, "Bob's Burgers"), who dreams of being an artist away from life on the family fishing boat. There is also oldest brother Wolf (Will Forte, "Last Man on Earth") and his fiancée Honeybee (Dulcé Sloan, "Chick Fight"); middle brother Ham (Paul Rust, "Love") and youngest brother Moon (Aparna Nancherla, "A Simple Favor"). And with her mother not available, Judy seeks guidance from boss Alyson (Megan Mullally, "Will & Grace") and her imaginary friend Alanis Morissette (voicing herself), who appears to her in the northern lights.

The series was created by "Bob's Burgers" writers/producers Wendy Molyneux and Lizzie Molyneux-Logelin, who originally conceived of this as a vehicle for Offerman and Slate and incorporated elements of themselves and their experiences into the characters, particularly Beef and Judy.

"We were talking a lot about our own experiences as teenage girls who maybe didn't always fit in," Wendy Molyneux explains, "and that's where we started thinking about Judy and Beef as this sort of like benevolent dad character. We thought the idea of them as a father/daughter combo would be really fun. And then we just wanted to think about an environment that we weren't currently seeing in animation and ... this idea of a little more of a kind of work-a-day dad and a more artistic daughter. And Alaska came up as an idea because Lizzie had visited there a few times and just found it kind of inspiring."

And Alaska isn't just a mere backdrop but a character, as its wildlife, topography and weather all play roles here. So do the northern lights, in the visage and voice of seven-time Grammy-winning singer/songwriter Morissette, who serves as Judy's lodestar.

"I think we always wanted Judy to have this big, emotional, fantastical life inside of her head," Lizzie Molyneux-Logelin explains. "I think part of that for us was a feeling about when we were teenagers, of sort of feeling like ... 'Oh, I can't wait to get out into the bigger world and see all of the things,' and sort of be a part of this world that you don't experience when you're just living in your hometown as a teenager. So I think Alanis really developed out of that, of giving her somebody to connect with that is part of sort of the more big, global world."

"And thank God Alanis Morissette wanted to play Alanis Morissette ...," Wendy Molyneux adds, "because only Alanis can be Alanis."

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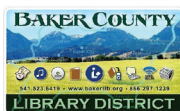
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