

Me and this fat kid / we ran, we ate and read books
/ and it was the best.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is a 2016 New Zealand adventure comedy-drama film written and directed by Taika Waititi, who plays the minister. The screenplay is based on the book *Wild Pork and Watercress* by Barry Crump. Julian Dennison stars Ricky Baker alongside Sam Neill as "Uncle" Hector. Rachel House brings in plenty of laughs as the antagonistic Paula Hall, Ricky's child welfare worker.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is a coming-of-age story for 13-year-old Ricky Baker, who's been in more than his fair share of foster homes. In fact, he's on his last one. If things don't work out at this one, he's off to juvie. At the start of the movie, he's never known a place to call home, never had a real family, and never really had people that cared about him.

Over the course of the movie, he learns to form relationships with others, experiences the first and best birthday he's ever had, and gains confidence he didn't have at the start of the film. He goes through a transformation both internally and externally displaying a little of his growth through practical wardrobe changes he makes while on the run.

One thing that stands out is how real and natural the character arcs come across. They aren't rushed, cheesy, or forced. Just when the audience might begin to forget that Ricky is still just a kid—after all, he's thirteen—the movie throws in an aptly placed comedic reminder. A whole SWAT team is searching for Ricky and Uncle, who hide directly to their right, hardly out of sight. As the SWAT team passes by, Ricky starts making hand motions to try to share a vital message with Uncle.

"I was trying to tell you this is just like the Lord of the Rings."

When Ricky turns the truck around amid a high-speed chase with pursuers on both sides, yes with Ricky driving rather than Uncle, the action of the scene slows down as he waves to Paula (his welfare worker.) This is another one of those moments where the audience is hit with how young Ricky truly is, but also how simple all of this is to him.

Everything is reduced to a child's black and white view of the world in a perfectly executed shot in this scene. He isn't running from child welfare because he's being forced to or to make anyone look bad. He isn't avoiding the system because he's a young criminal and wants to be free to do what he wishes. He's just a kid that has finally found a home and a family, and he's afraid of what will happen to him if he

has to go back, but even more, he's worried about what will happen if he loses the only family he's ever had.

Waititi uses 360-degree shots a few times in the movie to show the characters wandering around in one place and then show them in another by the end of the full circle of the shot. This adds to the comedic tone of the movie in a way that highlights the misadventures of the two characters out on the run in the wilderness while also showing the passage of time.

Waititi did an incredible job framing characters in a way that either brought a comedic angle to the situation's absurdity or shed some light on how the character might be feeling. Any time Ricky was framed in his full 'Gangster' attire, taking up only half of the shot with the rest filled with a very contrasting background of run-down buildings or someone skinning a dead animal, there was an immediate sense of how out of place this kid must feel. He has never in his life had a family or a home, and now he's on the run, fighting with everything he's got to keep the only one he's ever really cared about.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is *My Side of the Mountain* meets *Up* with the deadpan offbeat humor of *Thor: Ragnarok*. It starts strong and keeps the momentum going right through to the end. It's a heart-warming and comedic movie about family, friendship, belonging, and a teenager rebelling against authority.

It's a story you've heard before, told in a delightfully unexpected way. From a thirteen-year-old delinquent's haikus peppered throughout the film, to the light approach to serious topics, and finally, understanding that one doesn't choose the skux life, the skux life chooses you, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* is a majestic experience you won't soon forget.