



Adapted from:

**HUNT FOR THE
WILDERPEOPLE:
HIGHLIGHTING THE POWER
OF CREATIVITY
BY JOE URSELL**

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is a brilliant, riotously funny, and sweet new comedy from New Zealand writer/director Taika Waititi. Based on Barry Crump's novel Wild Port and Watercress, it tells the story of twelve-year-old Ricky, a rebellious boy who has never settled into life in the foster care system. Sent to live in a remote location with Bella and her gruff husband Hec, the change of pace and Bella's open honesty is initially good for Ricky. However, all is turned upside down when events suddenly force him to flee into the bush, with Hec hot on his heels. Despite previously not having much to say to one another, the two find themselves bonding deep in the wilderness as the authorities set up a wide-sweeping manhunt to find them.

During the course of their journey, Hec and Ricky gradually discover how much they like and depend on one another; their bonding a result of being reluctantly thrown together. The casting of legendary New Zealand actor Sam Neill – perhaps still best known for his role in Jurassic Park – provides an unlikely but amusing comparison. With Neill's presence, the characters' *bickering* relationship, numerous scary encounters with nature, and Ricky's physical resemblance to the annoying boy from the start of Jurassic Park – the one who compares raptors to "six-foot turkeys" – Wilderpeople has the feel of a never-seen Jurassic Park spin-off, where that boy from the opening was forced on the run with Dr. Alan Grant!

However, the film also deals with serious issues, including loss and abandonment. As charming and delightful as Ricky is, the audience is always aware that he is a troubled child who has suffered from a lack of love and feelings of neglect. The film shares a similar spirit with other great children's films like Where the Wild Things are, and Toy Story 3.

For many, Hunt for the Wilderpeople may resemble a slightly more mature version of Pixar's legendary Up, and it certainly shares that film's charm, humour and spirit of adventure – not to mention its emotional connection to the audience. Another iconic New Zealand film that deals with the deep bond that can develop between young and older people is Whale Rider. Both titles explore not only generational changes in attitude, but also what each can learn from the other, and the energising spirit that can infect older people as they rediscover their inner child.

The film highlights the power of creativity to help people express their feelings and emotions, even in rather modest ways. Hec may be a grumpy, and *morose* character, but he is also adjusting to being a widower and struggles with illiteracy. Unable to write down his feelings and reluctant to verbalise them, Hec is able to express himself through his love of drawing.

For Hec, being able to get to a position where he can show these images to others around him is a significant step in his emotional development. On the other hand, Ricky – going through his own troubles with life and school – turns to his love of rap music and deft ability with haikus (a type of short poem) to channel his creativity and emotions. Ricky's haikus are not only hilarious – suggesting that his unique sense of humour could be his ticket to a brighter future – but also add complexity to a character that could easily just be silly, but instead is someone we can relate to.

Wilderpeople is the latest in a long-line of fantastic films emerging from New Zealand, taking pride in the nation's unique landscape and national heritage as well as its quirks and eccentricities. Like the director's previous films, *Boy*, *What We Do In The Shadows* and *Eagle vs Shark*, the film celebrates what Waititi calls New Zealand's 'comedy of the mundane' – a dry, observational humour that finds the funniness in the everyday and the boring.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is a delightful, charming comedy, but the film reaches beyond that, becoming something truly special, showing us how humour, and laughter can get us through difficult situations.