

The Boy and the Heron

A Hayao Miyazaki Film



© 2003 Studio Ghibli

Color / Vista Vision / Dolby Cinema / Dolby Atmos
IMAX / Running time: 124 min.

INTRODUCTION

A young boy named Mahito
yearning for his mother
ventures into a world shared by the living and the dead.
There, death comes to an end,
and life finds a new beginning.

Mahito's guide
is part-heron, part-man,
and cunningly juggles lies and the truth.

The boy makes new friends,
reunites with his mother,

and meets the world's creator, the Granduncle.

"I'm so glad you were here."

A semi-autobiographical fantasy
about life, death, and creation,
in tribute to friendship,
from the mind of Hayao Miyazaki.

OVERVIEW

"The Boy and the Heron" is a fantasy film with an element of semi-autobiography. Its Japanese title, "Kimitachi wa Do Ikiruka" (published in Japan by Shinchosha), literally meaning "How do you live?", is borrowed from an eponymous novel by Genzaburo Yoshino that filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki was given in his youth by his mother. What's more, certain events from Miyazaki's childhood are depicted in this new animated feature for the first time ever.

Its story takes place in a past Japan that still exists vividly within Miyazaki's memories.

After losing his mother in a fire in Tokyo, 11-year-old Mahito moves to the countryside with his father Shoichi to take up residence at the Gray Heron Mansion, a fusion of Japanese and Western architecture on a sprawling leafy estate.

Mahito struggles with his complex feelings toward his bold and forceful father, as well as his new stepmother Natsuko, who also happens to be his late mother's younger sister. Isolation and alienation drive Mahito to self-harm and shut himself off inside his new home. Everything changes when he is visited by a gray heron, who eventually reveals himself to be the avian guise of a shapeshifting "heron man."

The estate was once the abode of the Granduncle, who is said to have become mentally unstable from reading too many books, and ultimately vanished into thin air. The mansion is staffed by several elderly maids, who watch over Mahito. Led by the gray heron, Mahito ventures further into the dark corners of the estate, where time and space begin to warp, dreams and reality blend into one another, and a world far beyond exerts an inescapable pull.

He sets foot into a world where life and death exist on the same plane. After passing through a gate, he meets Kiriko, a fisherwoman who bears a similar scar on her head, who introduces him to the secrets of the world.

The Warawara, creatures who embody both life and death. Pelicans who continue to soar high into the sky despite the injuries it causes them. A parakeet king leading legions of his fellow birds, who are caricatures of human mass society. Himi, a girl with the power to wield fire.

Mahito and the heron man delve deeper and deeper into this world — which appears to be a simulacrum of our own — that has suddenly sprung into being and lost all balance and control.

Why has Mahito been led into this domain shared by the living and the dead? Is

his late mother actually still alive? Who is the mysterious maiden Himi, and what does the Granduncle, who maintains the equilibrium of this world, want from Mahito...?

FEATURE FILM PROPOSAL NOTES: CAN WE MAKE A FEATURE FILM?

Issues with the director

There's nothing more pathetic than telling the world you'll retire because of your age, then making yet another comeback. Is it truly possible to accept how pathetic that is, and do it anyway? Doesn't an elderly person deluding themselves that they're still capable, despite their geriatric forgetfulness, prove that they're past their best? You bet it does.

It's all very well to drag in others and cause a heap of trouble yet still finish a film, but it's also entirely possible that you could become bedridden or die come crunch time. The instigator himself might be fully prepared for that, but for those who'd end up burdened with an incomplete mishmash of a film, it would be unbearable. Feature-length films take at least three years to complete. I could do one in a year when I was in my 40s, but now I'm 75, it's a lot to get done in three years, and I'm tempted to say "Let me work on it till I'm 80." Well, that's something that Pakusan (fellow filmmaker Isao Takahata) went through already, so presuming that whoever's producing the film has the determination to push ahead to completion, the real conundrum is: what will the world be like in three years time?

What state will the world and minds of viewers be in when they greet our film? Surely our current age, indistinctly drifting, indefinable, and indiscernible, is reaching its end? Isn't the world as a whole in a state of flux?

We could be heading for war or disaster, or perhaps even both.

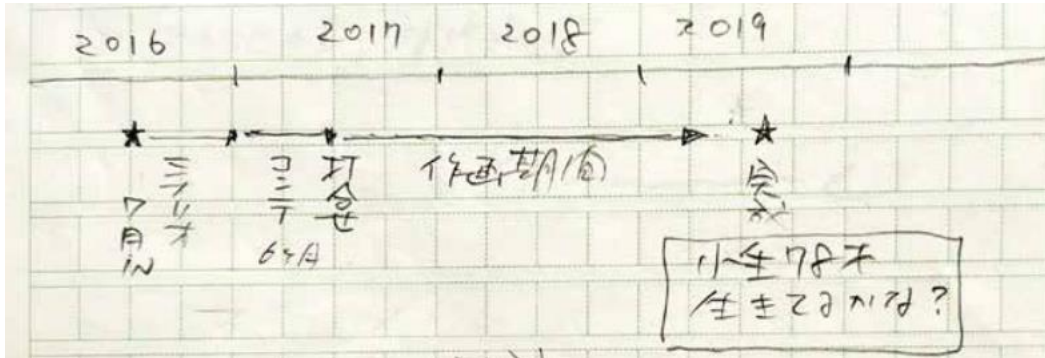
In times like these, when making a film that'll take three years to complete, what shape should it take...?

First, something emphatically peaceful, like "Totoro." "Totoro II" perhaps? We could do that. I get the feeling we could make something worthwhile. That's just a feeling, but if war were to break out, it could be even more meaningful.

Secondly, a film set during wartime. A film ahead of its time, made with the realization that the times could catch up with us before we're able to complete it.

The film must not pander to its era. If I could be inhumanly irresponsible, I'd like to make a film about the Battle of the Yalu River in the Sino-Japanese War, but that's just a personal predilection. Scratch that.

Schedule: all handwritten



2016

Screenplay commences in July

2017

Storyboarding (six months)

Meeting

2018

Key drawing period

2019

Completion

I'll be 78 by then

Will I still be alive?

Staff organization:

"Zombie Ghibli" won't do. We'll have just about enough key animators, but who should be supervising animator... I want Takeshige and Yoshida to take care of art direction.

Other issues to solve:

As far as money goes, producer Suzuki will no doubt sort something out. His bad back will probably sort itself out.

For our key animators, we'll promote our junior animators. Does anyone come to mind? No names leap out at me... Hmm.

Obviously, our greatest problem is the advanced age of the director.

Hmm...

Will the story come together?

Hmm...

We need to whittle it down.

Hmm...

That's all.

July 1, 2016

*The three-year production period actually stretched to seven years.

THEME SONG “SPINNING GLOBE”

LYRICS, MUSIC AND PERFORMED BY KENSHI YONEZU

The clear sky on the day I was born was so high, distant, and endless
The day I heard a voice patting me on the back telling me to go ahead

Faces I met in the seasons, at times hurting one another
Shine by the light, the shadow extends as the sky grows further away

I catch the wind and start running, overcoming the rubble
At the end of this road, someone is waiting for me
Dream of light shining through, at any day of the week
Open the door this moment, like revealing hidden secrets
Can't hold myself longing for more, like the spinning globe

The person I loved has gone to somewhere no one knows
With the usual kind smile as any other day, still somewhere far away

I take in the rain and start singing, not minding if seen
This road continues because I wished it would continue
I dream of meeting again, for ever and ever
I grasped the fragment firmly, so the secret remains
I'll keep longing till the end, like the spinning globe

It all starts from an innocent wish made long ago
Carrying the loneliness in my heart, I turn the corner

I catch the wind and start running, overcoming the rubble
At the end of this road, someone is waiting for me
Dream of light shining through, at any day of the week
Open the door this moment, like revealing hidden secrets
The joy of holding ones hand, the suffering of losing one
Can't hold myself from picturing, like the spinning globe

SYNOPSIS

Tokyo, near the end of World War II in the Pacific. 11-year-old Mahito loses his mother in a fire, and takes refuge with his father in his mother's hometown. They move into an old mansion on a large estate, which also includes a secluded tower that has become a nesting spot for a gray heron.

Mahito struggles with complex feelings toward his father, who runs a factory supplying the war effort, and his new stepmother Natsuko, who happens to be his mother's younger sister. To make matters worse, he becomes alienated at school. Mahito was told that the tower was built by his mother's granduncle, who eventually disappeared inside it, never to be seen again.

One day, Natsuko suddenly goes missing, so Mahito ventures into the tower to look for her. Led by the gray heron, he unwittingly ends up embarking on an odyssey into another world.

Mahito finds himself in a bizarre realm where the living and the dead exist side by side. As he encounters its astonishing inhabitants, he comes to learn of the secrets of the world.

A HAYAO MIYAZAKI FILM

ORIGINAL STORY, SCREENPLAY AND DIRECTED BY HAYAO MIYAZAKI

MUSIC BY JOE HISAISHI THEME SONG "SPINNING GLOBE" BY KENSHI YONEZU (SONY MUSIC LABELS INC.)

STUDIO GHIBLI PRESENTS

A STUDIO GHIBLI PRODUCTION "THE BOY AND THE HERON"

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS KOJI HOSHINO GORO MIYAZAKI AND KIYOFUMI NAKAJIMA PRODUCED BY TOSHIO SUZUKI