



ANIME

Wolf Children

Japanese animated fantasy *Wolf Children* comes to Britain weeks after Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*) announced his retirement from filmmaking. On the evidence of this film (bolstered by two excellent previous features, *The Girl Who Leapt through Time* and *Summer Wars*), director Mamoru Hosoda has the best claim to be Miyazaki's creative successor.

In *Wolf Children*, a heroic mother must find a way to raise her unique children, who can become wolves at will. The film starts with a Tokyo college student, Hana, noticing a stranger in one of her lectures. The two become friends, then closer, and when, on a starry winter night, the youth reveals himself to be a wolfman, the girl reacts with wonder. The couple's relationship plays out in delicate, dialogue-free montages, like a less winsome version of the overture to Pixar's *Up* (2009), and with an equally heartbreaking payoff.

The main story takes place in remote mountains, where Hana subsequently goes to raise her children. There's plenty of comedy, including a wonderfully simple cartoon moment when little Yuki repeatedly demands food, growing wolf ears and a doggy nose as her voice rises. Pity the parent of a shape-changing toddler who gnaws tables and chews cushions.

Other parts of the film, such as the scenes of Hana trying to build a life in Japan's hilly countryside, may play less well to British audiences. The heart of the story is Hana's fortitude through adversity, and how she must adapt through no fault of her own. Viewers expecting Pixar-style comedy may be bored. But the appeal of Japanese animation to many foreigners is precisely such differences in approach, especially when they transform the familiar. For example, a curmudgeonly farmer character who helps Hana (voiced in Japanese by former gangster actor Sugawara Bunta) looks like late-period Clint Eastwood, and Hosoda acknowledges that he had Eastwood in mind.

The unshaded character designs have a naive appearance, even by the standards of drawn animations. As in Studio Ghibli films, the quasi-real background detail is fascinating – the country setting is based on Hosoda's own childhood home. Viewers may quibble with the characters' destinies but the resolution is both tear-jerking and cathartic. Thoroughly delightful, *Wolf Children* shames most contemporary Hollywood animations with its sweep and originality.

Andrew Osmond, *Sight & Sound*, December 2013

Wolf Children is Mamoru Hosoda's fourth animated feature, after several years' work on kids' TV show *Digimon*. 2006's *The Girl Who Leapt through Time* showcased his interest in both small details (in its careful animation) and big questions.

Wolf Children continues in that vein: painterly realist backgrounds, richly textured, play host to the story of an unusual family. Yuki's opening voiceover introduces us to her mother Hana and her father – the descendant of the last wild Japanese wolf and a human. Unblushingly outlining their courtship and Yuki's conception, the film then moves between three stories: Hana becoming the mother of two werewolves, and the lives of the two children-pups.

Hoping for anonymity and self-sufficiency, Hana moves to the countryside and a house reminiscent of the fixer-upper rented by the family in *My Neighbour Totoro*. As the children grow up – Yuki boisterous, her little brother Ame shy – Hana learns to farm and befriends the neighbours. Through an encounter with a wolf at the zoo where Hana works, Ame grows enraptured by the wolf world, while Yuki's time at school has made her want to fit into the human world.

What younger viewers will make of the second half of the film, with its long scenes of potato-planting and pre-adolescent angst, is difficult to guess, but it's hard to imagine any viewer not being utterly delighted by the family's first encounter with snow. Hana's back-to-the-land plan resonates with the eco-conscious cinema of Studio Ghibli, while Yuki's first crush and the separation of the siblings is reminiscent of the ethical and emotional conundrums of *The Girl Who Leapt through Time*. *Wolf Children* is a more coherent film than Hosoda's previous work, but equally unusual in its ambition to tell a big, complex story.

So Mayer, bfi.org.uk

Mamoru Hosoda's focus on mundane, everyday existence continues in *Wolf Children*, one of anime's most powerful films about motherhood. Even the initial romance between protagonist Hana and the werewolf father of her children (who remains unnamed) begins under pretty normal circumstances: the pair are university students who, after a brief meet-cute, fall in love.

Wolf Children is both familiar and truly empathetic in its depictions of Hana's struggles and joys as she raises her children as a single mother. Hosoda again draws from his own life, building the film around the experiences of his own childhood and impending parenthood.

It's also about his own mother, who, like Hana, raised him as a single parent. Even the farming town it takes place in is based on his childhood home. The dynamics between parent and child, and between siblings, take precedence here, the children each discovering their own identities and struggling with their place in the world.

Hana isn't a perfect mother. She's perhaps overprotective, and unable to fully help Ame and Yuki understand their dual identity. But Hosoda's empathy with those flaws – and his understanding of the pride and pain of inevitable separation as they move on with their lives – truly packs a punch.

Kambole Campbell, bfi.org.uk

WOLF CHILDREN (ÔKAMI KODOMO NO AME TO YUKI)

Director: Mamoru Hosoda

Production Companies: Studio Chizu,
Madhouse Studios

Executive Producer: Seiji Okuda

Producers: Takafumi Watanabe, Takuya Ito, Yuichiro Saito

Screenplay: Mamoru Hosoda, Satoko Okudera

Animation Director: Takaaki Yamashita

Editor: Shigeru Nishiya

Art Director: Hiroshi Ohno

Character Designer: Yoshiyuki Sadamoto

Music: Takagi Masakatsu

Voice Cast:

Aoi Miyazaki (*voice of Hana*)

Takao Osawa (*voice of Ookami, Wolf Man*)

Yukito Nishii (*voice of young Ame*)

Momoka Ôno (*voice of Yuki*)

Takuma Hiraoka (*voice of Souhei*)

Haru Kuroki (*voice of young Yuki*)

Amon Kabe (*voice of Ame*)

Takashi Kobayashi (*voice of Grandpa Nira*)

Japan 2012

117 mins

CONTEMPORARY ANIME AUTEURS**Your Name (Kimi no Na wa)**

Sun 1 May 12:30, 18:00 (BFI IMAX)

**The Girl Who Leapt through Time
(Toki o Kakeru Shôjo)**

Sun 1 May 14:45; Sat 28 May 14:50

Weathering with You (Tenki no Ko)

Sun 1 May 15:15, 20:30 (BFI IMAX)

Tokyo Godfathers (Tôkyô Goddofâzâzu)

Sun 1 May 18:00; Sat 28 May 12:30

Perfect Blue (Pâfekuto Burû)

Mon 2 May 18:40; Sat 14 May 20:45

**The Place Promised in our Early Days
(Kumo no Mukô, Yakusoku no Basho)**

Tue 3 May 18:00; Sun 22 May 15:00

5 Centimeters per Second (Byôsoku 5 Senchimêtoru)**+ The Garden of Words (Kotonoha no Niwa)**

Tue 3 May 20:45; Sat 21 May 17:50

Millennium Actress (Sennen Joyû)

Wed 4 May 20:55; Sat 7 May 11:50;

Mon 23 May 18:15 (BFI IMAX)

Summer Wars (Samâ Uôzu)

Sat 7 May 20:45; Sat 28 May 18:00

Paprika (Papurika)

Fri 13 May 20:40; Wed 18 May 20:45

Wolf Children (Ôkami kodomo no Ame to Yuki)

Sat 14 May 17:40; Sat 28 May 20:40

ANIME CLASSICS PART 1**Tekkonkinkreet (Tekkon kinkurîto)**

Sun 1 May 12:10; Thu 5 May 20:50

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya (Kaguya-hime no Monogatari)

Tue 3 May 14:00; Tue 3 May 17:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Akira

Tue 3 May 20:30; Mon 23 May 15:00; Mon 23 May 20:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Lupin the 3rd: The Castle of Cagliostro (Kariosutoro no Shiro)

Wed 4 May 14:30; Tue 31 May 20:45

Fullmetal Alchemist the Movie: Conqueror of Shamballa**(Gekijô-ban Hagane no Renkinjutsushi: Shanbara o Yuku Mono)**

Fri 6 May 21:00; Mon 9 May 20:40

Memories (Memorîzu)

Sun 15 May 12:00; Tue 24 May 20:40

Grave of the Fireflies (Hotaru no Haka)

Thu 19 May 18:00 + intro by Alex Dudok de Wit, author of BFI Film

Classics: Grave of the Fireflies; Fri 27 May 20:45

This season was co-programmed by writer and academic Hanako Miyata



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