



## NEW RELEASES

# Monster (Kaibutsu)

### Monster (Kaibutsu)

Director: Hirokazu Koreeda

Producers: Genki Kawamura, Kenji Yamada,

Megumi Banse, Taichi Ito, Hijiri Taguchi

Screenplay: Yūji Sakamoto

Cinematography: Ryūtō Kondo

Editor: Hirokazu Koreeda

Production Design: Keiko Mitsumatsu

Costume Design: Kazuko Kurosawa

Music: Ryuichi Sakamoto

Cast:

Sakura Andō (Saori)

Eita Nagayama (Hori)

Soya Kurokawa (Minato)

Hinata Hiiragi (Yori)

Mitsuki Takahata (Hirona)

Akihiro Kakuta (Shoda)

Shidō Nakamura (Kiyotaka)

Yūko Tanaka (Fushimi)

Japan 2023

126 mins

Digital

A Picturehouse Entertainment release

An incident of classroom misconduct – and its ramifications, both domestic and institutional – plays out from three different vantage points in *Monster*. ‘Perspectives’ wouldn’t quite be the right term: though each section of Hirokazu Koreeda’s elegantly folded new film leads with a different character, the action is never shown explicitly through anyone’s eyes. Reverse angles and newly adjacent, contextualising scenes shift our conception of blame and victimhood in a story that narrows from one of a hostile community to intimate, ecstatic isolation.

*Rashomon* (1950) has been raised repeatedly by critics as a reference point since *Monster* premiered at Cannes last year, but it’s hardly the same. Koreeda’s film doesn’t pit contradicting stories against each other; rather, it layers accounts fraught with blind spots and psychological frailties – building a bigger picture while stressing everyone’s essential unknowability. At Cannes, *Monster* won the Queer Palme for the best LGBTQ+ story; it’s indicative of the film’s lithe, shimmying structure that viewers may spend the bulk of its running time mystified as to why.

For Koreeda, the film marks both a homecoming – to Japanese cinema, after somewhat ungainly excursions to France (*The Truth*, 2019) and South Korea (*Broker*, 2022) – and a departure. It’s his first feature since his 1995 debut *Maborosi* that he hasn’t written, and while Yūji Sakamoto’s elaborately diagrammatic screenplay plays to Koreeda’s strengths with its fine-grained family drama and empathetic focus on children, its narrative switches and reversals require more opacity and emotional reticence than is customary from his filmmaking.

It begins with a building ablaze on the squat skyline of a small, unspecified Japanese city; a freak rainstorm will bookend proceedings, the elements twice uncannily intervening in a story of human impulse and foible. On one floor of the burning block is a hostess bar supposedly frequented by mild-mannered primary school teacher Mr Hori (Eita Nagayama); some distance away, widowed single mother Saori (Sakura Andō, the marvellous star of Koreeda’s 2018 film *Shoplifters*) watches the inferno with morbid interest from her apartment balcony. Her pre-teen son Minato (Soya Kurokawa) is one of Hori’s students; his mother’s distaste for Hori’s rumoured extracurricular activities will soon factor into a tense bust-up with the school staff.

The hitherto gentle Minato has become sullen and unreadable – cutting his own hair, going awol in a storm drain, jumping from his mother’s moving car. When he comes home from school with a facial injury, saying Hori is responsible, Saori reads the teacher and oddly impassive headmistress Fushimi (Yūko Tanaka) the riot act. She gets repeated deferential apologies, but no explanation; the script is sharp on how a culture of courtesy can impede candour.

After 45 minutes, we rewind to the beginning, with Hori’s knowledge of classroom dynamics recalibrating our perception of Minato’s behaviour. But the teacher’s outburst that Minato is a bully – and his smaller, feyer classmate Yori (Hinata Hiiragi) his target – doesn’t ring true either: the boys are friends, perhaps chastely more, with an understanding of each other that increasingly excludes their minders.

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://bfi.org.uk/join)

## SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI’s internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](https://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)



## BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](https://player.bfi.org.uk)

## NEW RELEASES

### Robot Dreams

From Mon 25 Mar

### Monster Kaibutsu

From Mon 25 Mar

### Silver Haze

From Fri 29 Mar

### Close Your Eyes

 Cerrar los ojos

From Fri 12 Apr

### Made in England:

#### The Films of Powell and Pressburger

From Fri 10 May

### Hoard

From Fri 10 May

## RE-RELEASES

### Rome, Open City

 Roma città aperta

From Fri 17 May

## BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at [www.bfi.org.uk/signup](http://www.bfi.org.uk/signup)

'Who is the monster?' is a recurring question in Koreeda's film, vocalised by the boys in a taunting, sing-song chant, but essentially paraphrased by adult characters keen to divide the world into villains and victims. Fushimi's strange, affectless manner stems from the recent death of her grandchild, in which she may have been culpable; Yori's alcoholic single father (Shidō Nakamura) may be his real abuser, implanting a ludicrous lie in the boy's mind – that his brain was transplanted with a pig's – which ripples maliciously through the action.

Some may find this a lot of business to wade through to get to the film's heart, crystallised in its final third: a naive, intensely pure romance of sorts between two grieving boys, exquisitely played by Hiiragi and Kurokawa. But the friction between adults' rule-determined antagonism and the unbound emotional and imaginative expression of childhood is essential to the film's payoff – ineffable tragedy rising into galloping, sunlit release.

Guy Lodge, *Sight and Sound*, April 2024

### Hirokazu Koreeda on 'Monster'

*The film has been compared to Rashomon [1950], but your approach is very different to Kurosawa's. How do you feel about that?*

I understand the comparison, but the name of the film was not often mentioned during the development of the film between screenwriter and producers, and I believe they have fundamentally different structures. Instead, Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* [2003] has been brought up. But of course it is an honour to be compared to Kurosawa's masterpiece.

*You spoke to an organisation that supports LGBTQ+ children about the relationship between the two boys in the film. What did you learn from that?*

To what extent is the protagonist aware of his own sexuality? For example, does he self-identify by using the word 'gay', or is he at an earlier stage where he hasn't reached that awareness? I was advised to make those points clearer, so I selected and deleted scenes and dialogues according to that advice.

*For a lot of parents, once their children are at school – a large part of their lives become unknowable. How do you feel the film explores this idea? Can cinema help us better understand the more mysterious parts of children's worlds?*

In a broad sense, I think it can help. However, before we can 'understand', we need to know how much we don't know, and... we need to acknowledge that we are a threat, and sometimes a perpetrator, to the fragile and sensitive existence of children.

Interview by Katie McCabe, *Sight and Sound*, April 2024