



## RE-RELEASES

# Watership Down

### Watership Down

*Directed by:* Martin Rosen

*©/Production Company:* Watership Productions Ltd

*Presented by:* Nepenthe Productions Ltd

*Produced by:* Martin Rosen

*Production Manager:* Dennis Gardiner

*Production Co-ordinator:* Philip Alton

*Production Accountants:* Ron Garrett, Jo Gregory, Linda Gregory

*Production Secretaries:* Judy Hayward, Marilyn Barham

*Written for the screen by:* Martin Rosen

*From the novel by:* Richard Adams

*Camera:* Tony Haines, Bob Mintern, Les Green, Ron Boston, Moses Agyemang, Julian Holdaway, Denis Hall, Barry Orsborn, Alan Buchan, Chris Williams, David Smith, Christopher Morgan

*Animation Supervisor:* Philip Duncan

*Animation Director:* Tony Guy

*Senior Animators:* Arthur Humberstone, George Jackson, Tony Guy, Philip Duncan

*Animators:* Edric Radage, Bill Littlejohn, Ruth Kissane, John Perkins, Ralph Ayres, Brian Foster, Chris Evans, Marie Szmichowska, Alan Simpson, Colin White, Doug Jensen, Bill Geach, Spud Houston, Barrie Nelson

*Assistant Animators:* Ray Kelly, Alistair Byrt, Malcolm Bourne, April Spencer, Sarah Vincent, Bobby Clennell, Chris Caunter, Steve Woods, Carol Slade, Rosemary Welch

*Checking:* Miles Foster, Steve Colwell, Marie Turner

*Layout Artists:* Gordon Harrison, Peter See, Ted Pettengell

*Senior Background Artists:* Ian Henderson, Gary Sycamore, Sue Branch

*Background Artists:* Errol Bryant, Paul Shardlow, Rodolfo Azaro, Brian Melling, Dennis Ryan

*Assistant Background Artists:* Vanessa Clegg, Richard Bell

*Trace and Paint Supervisors:* Donna Baker, Peter Turner

*Colour Co-ordination:* Alma Sachs

*Trace and Paint:* Sandy Houston, Karen Webb, Jose Sanz, Lynn Anderson, Elaine Mills, Maggie Brown, Olive Scott, Barbara Todeschini, Alan Andrews, Ann Kennedy, Margot Allen, Dennis Sutton, Briony Catling, Roby Hamilton-Garrett, Helga Egilson, Wendi Ellis, Roger Way, Josephine Poole, David Mcfall, Joan Bradshaw, Dot Morse, Sheila Thompson, Priscilla Rhodes, Maria Hemmleb, Rosemary Morgan

*Edited by:* Terry Rawlings

*Assembly Editor:* Roy Piper

*Assistant Editors:* Leslie Healey, William Webb

*Optical Editor:* Philip Campbell

*Special Sequence Design:* Luciana Arrighi

*Titles:* Brian Terry

*Music Composed and Arranged by:* Angela Morley

*Incidental Music by:* Malcolm Williamson

*Musical Director:* Marcus Dods

*Music Editor:* Brian Lintern

*Music Mixer:* John Richards

*Dubbing Mixer:* Bill Rowe

*Re-recorded at:* EMI Studios Borehamwood

*Effects Mixer:* Ray Merrin

*Voice Cast:*

John Hurt (*Hazel*)

Richard Briers (*Fiver*)

Michael Graham Cox (*Bigwig*)

John Bennett (*Captain Holly*)

Ralph Richardson (*chief rabbit*)

Simon Cadell (*Blackberry*)

Terence Rigby (*Silver*)

A landmark in British animation, this adaptation of Richard Adams' novel makes a welcome return to our screens. A building project threatens the tranquil lives of the wildlife residing in a British woodland area, including rabbits occupying a local warren. Fiver has distressing visions of impending destruction and persuades a small group to join him on a challenging journey to a safe utopia known as Watership Down. This glorious adaptation of Adams' novel is no less hard hitting in its depiction of survival and conflict than it is a work of great beauty. An impressive voice cast elevates it further.

This remaster, carried out by the BFI, brings this marvellous film to new generations in pristine condition. As the director Guillermo del Toro said of it, '*Watership Down* stands alone as a horizon never reached – a portal into what animation can be, could be: an art form. It fuels the hope for that future. A delicate, violent, savage confection – perfect and sharp, like a diamond knife.'

Justin Johnson, Lead Programmer

In a barren period for animated features, producer Martin Rosen saw the opportunity to translate the success of Richard Adams' bestselling fantasy to the big screen. After original director John Hubley was fired for favouring experimentation over productivity, Rosen took over the directorial reins himself, guiding a team of young British animators afforded relative creative autonomy thanks to unique funding from commercial banks.

In keeping with Adams' often harsh vision, the rabbits are notably less anthropomorphised than most animated animals, with Rosen's team taking a naturalistic approach to their physical attributes and wilder instincts. However, these furry creatures are still a cultured group, and the film faithfully sets out the rabbits' own folklore, religion, poetry and their own language, Lapine.

Despite some very violent scenes, the film was awarded a 'U' certificate, while the oft-repeated contention that it is too dark for children, not least with its religious and political subtext, has led to comparisons with pioneering British animation *Animal Farm* (d. John Halas & Joy Batchelor, 1954). Whereas Orwell's famous four-legged fable was an attack on Stalinism, *Watership Down* can be read as a political allegory attacking fascism and appeasement. Nevertheless, editor Terry Rawlings manages to maintain the energy of what remains a vivid adventure narrative when it could have been mired in subtext.

The film embraces the natural, rendering the rich hues of the English countryside onto canvas, while the sound effects were sourced from the actual locations in Hampshire that inspired Adams' original tale. Despite a pastoral score from Angela Morley and Malcolm Williamson, the film's soundtrack was popularised by the song 'Bright Eyes', composed by Mike Batt and sung by Art Garfunkel. With a video using scenes from the film, 'Bright Eyes' scored a UK number one some six months after *Watership Down's* release and secured the film's place in British popular culture.

Attracting the cream of British voice talent, led by John Hurt and Richard Briers, *Watership Down* is an admirable example of an uncompromising British animation that initially struggled to find distribution before box office returns confounded expectations. Rosen's attempt to repeat the formula with another Adams novel, *The Plague Dogs* (1982), was less successful, however, as was a return to *Watership Down* some 20 years later for a children's series (ITV, 1999), which suffered from the dilution of adult themes for a younger audience.

Stephen Collings, BFI Screenonline

Roy Kinnear (*Pipkin*)  
Richard O'Callaghan (*Dandelion*)  
Denholm Elliott (*Cowslip*)  
Lyn Farleigh (*Cat*)  
Mary Maddox (*Clover*)  
Zero Mostel (*Kehaar*)  
Harry Andrews (*General Woundwort*)  
Hannah Gordon (*Hyzenthlay*)  
Nigel Hawthorne (*Captain Campion*)  
Clifton Jones (*Blackavar*)  
Derek Griffiths (*Vervain*)  
Michael Hordern (*Frith*)  
Joss Ackland (*Black Rabbit*)  
Michelle Price (*Lucy*)  
UK 1978©  
92 mins  
Digital 4K

A BFI release

*Watership Down* has been restored in 4K high dynamic range from the original 35mm negative and magnetic stereo audio tracks by BFI Distribution and Silver Salt Restoration

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**The Apprentice** From Mon 21 Oct  
**The Room Next Door** From Fri 25 Oct  
**Layla** From Fri 25 Oct  
**Anora** From Fri 1 Nov  
**Bird** From Fri 15 Nov  
**All We Imagine as Light** From Fri 29 Nov

## RE-RELEASES

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## Making 'Watership Down'

Producer/director Martin Rosen was introduced to the book *Watership Down* on location in Kashmir when, after being rejected by 17 publishers as unpublishable, it had finally found a home as a Puffin. Rosen recalls: 'A production manager was reading a book which everybody else was making fun of, but when he thrust it into my hands I read it and was quickly convinced. As soon as I got back to England, I called Richard Adams and bought the rights to a film version.'

Adams privately believed his book to be unfilmable, but nonetheless gave Rosen a guided tour of the real Watership Down, on the Berkshire-Hampshire border, and of some of the locations described in the book – Nuthanger Farm and the River Test. Along the way, they discussed the themes the author saw as most important. However, Rosen did not seek Adams' approval for the screenplay, because the two men agreed that a book is a book and a film is a film. Adams reiterated this point in the book-of-the-film. In his introduction he wrote: 'People who want to read the story should read my *Watership Down*, and people who want to know more about the drawings in this book should go and see the film.'

When Rosen first bought the rights, it was not certain in his mind that there were even going to be drawings, since he is not himself an animator. In fact, he went through every other possibility first: 'I thought about stop-motion photography [as used in *King Kong*], puppets, live rabbits – even humans dressed up as rabbits! But I always suspected that in the end I would choose drawn animation.'

Once that medium had been fixed on, Rosen laid down two ground rules for the hundreds of artists he assembled in London to produce the necessary 200,000 drawings. In essence, he said: 'This film is going to be above all about adventure, courage, aggression, heroism and loyalty. The fact that the characters are rabbits is secondary to the story. But – and this is important – it is central to the animation. No rabbit in this film must do anything that a real rabbit, in purely physical terms, could not do. For example, no rabbit can put a paw round another rabbit's shoulder, or dress up in white tie and tails. Furthermore, real rabbits do not have whites in their eyes; so, though whites are very useful to animators for conveying expression, there will be none in this film.'

There is still one vital difference between Rosen's rabbits and real rabbits – Rosen's can talk. Mostly, the language they speak is standard English, but a few words may sound strange to anyone who has not read the book, so here is a short glossary of the rabbit vocabulary devised by Adams:

ELIL. Collective term for all the rabbits' enemies – fox, stoat, cat, man, dog, owl, etc.

FLAYRAH. Particularly good food, such as lettuce.

FRITH. The sun, regarded by rabbits as a god.

HLESSI. A wandering rabbit, without a regular warren, who lives above ground.

HRUDUDU. Any motor vehicle.

Terry Staples