



## Hunt For The Wilderpeople



OUT NOW / RATED PG / 101 MINS.

**DIRECTOR** Taika Waititi

**CAST** Sam Neill, Julian Dennison, Rachel House, Rima Te Wiata, Rhys Darby

**PLOT** In the wild New Zealand bush, foster kid/gangsta-wannabe Ricky Baker (Dennison) escapes child services and a stint in juvie by hiding from authorities with his foster "uncle", Hector (Neill).

**IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T HEARD,** Taika Waititi is directing *Thor 3*. For those familiar with the Kiwi's CV, which boasts a series of charming and critically successful indie comedies, a superhero blockbuster is a hard left turn. With *Eagle vs Shark*, *Boy* and vampire mock-doc *What We Do In The Shadows*, Waititi has made a name for himself with a whimsical, sweet-natured humour, his films always striking the right balance of humour and heart. *Wilderpeople* follows suit and joins his repertoire of NZ-based films that are much like the country itself: quirky, free-spirited and endearingly understated.

Ricky Baker — the parentless, chubby, misbehaving teen protagonist of *Wilderpeople* — has been passed around foster families his entire life. Most screenwriters would turn this foundation into something grim, but Waititi flips Ricky's sob story on its head and moulds

it into a light-hearted romp that's equal parts coming-of-age tale and road adventure. Based on Barry Crump's book *Wild Pork And Watercress*, the film follows Ricky first into his new foster home, and then into the relentless NZ bush, where he and his gruff foster uncle Hec gradually develop a unique bond. Between trippy hunger-induced visions of talking hamburgers, take-downs of dim-witted bushmen and a wild pig attack, the unlikely duo's adventure is undoubtedly wacky, but bares enough pathos to keep the story motivated and the audience on-board.

Waititi didn't audition anyone for the role of Ricky, instead handing it off to newcomer Julian Dennison. His instincts were right, as Dennison seems born to play the affable miscreant. He nails the youthful naivety, sass, and hubris that make Ricky so endlessly entertaining, but maintains a milder soft side in his performance, giving his character a vulnerability (masked by scrappy hip-hop hoodies) that shines through when he recites haiku poetry, or stands up for his new father-figure friend.

*Wilderpeople* demonstrates Waititi's impressively consistent handle on his film, with an engaging script and plenty of stylistic techniques that only amplify an endearing tone that harkens back to classic '80s adventure-comedies. With heart, soul, and wit, *Wilderpeople* is sure to win over even the grumpiest bushman.

**JOHANNA GRUBER**

**VERDICT:** Imaginative style and winning characters make this heart-warming (and momentarily heart-wrenching) flick a must-see. Just try to get the "Ricky Baker" song out of your head.

Even at family gatherings, Neill kept one eye out for velociraptors.

### BONUS FEATURE

## WILDER-HELMER

**DIRECTOR TAIKA WAITITI ON THE JOY OF BIG CAR CHASES AND KIWIS VISITING ASGARD**

**Where did you find Julian Dennison? He's great!**

He'd been in two films before this — *Shopping*, this small New Zealand film, then a film that did really well in Aussie called *Paper Planes*. I worked with him on a commercial, and he was really funny, and I guess I just discovered then how good he was to work with.

**The "Ricky Baker" song is incredible, and such an earworm. Who came up with it?**

That was a collective effort. In that scene we were singing *Happy Birthday*, then one of the producers came in and said "Sorry, I just realised that *Happy Birthday* isn't out of copyright yet." I had my little Casio keyboard on set, and basically we just got Rima, who plays Bella, to come up with some chords, then we all pitched in lyrics, and just cobbled it together at the last minute. It was a great thing to stumble upon, because I feel like it's a lot better than *Happy Birthday*.

**Was it fun doing the big car chase at the climax?**

Totally. I took a lot of inspiration from those '80s films, just things like *Blues Brothers*, like if you have the chance to flip a police car over, you just have to do it. I wrote that in: 'A police car flies in the air for no reason at all'.

**Will you chuck some NZ references into *Thor 3*?**

I might try and sneak some New Zealanders in. There's a couple of people I always use in my films, and if I can I'll find a small part for them, just to satisfy this weird thing that I have where I want to keep that pattern going. **JAMES JENNINGS**

