

Legends of Animation

Hayao Miyazaki



Jeff Lenburg

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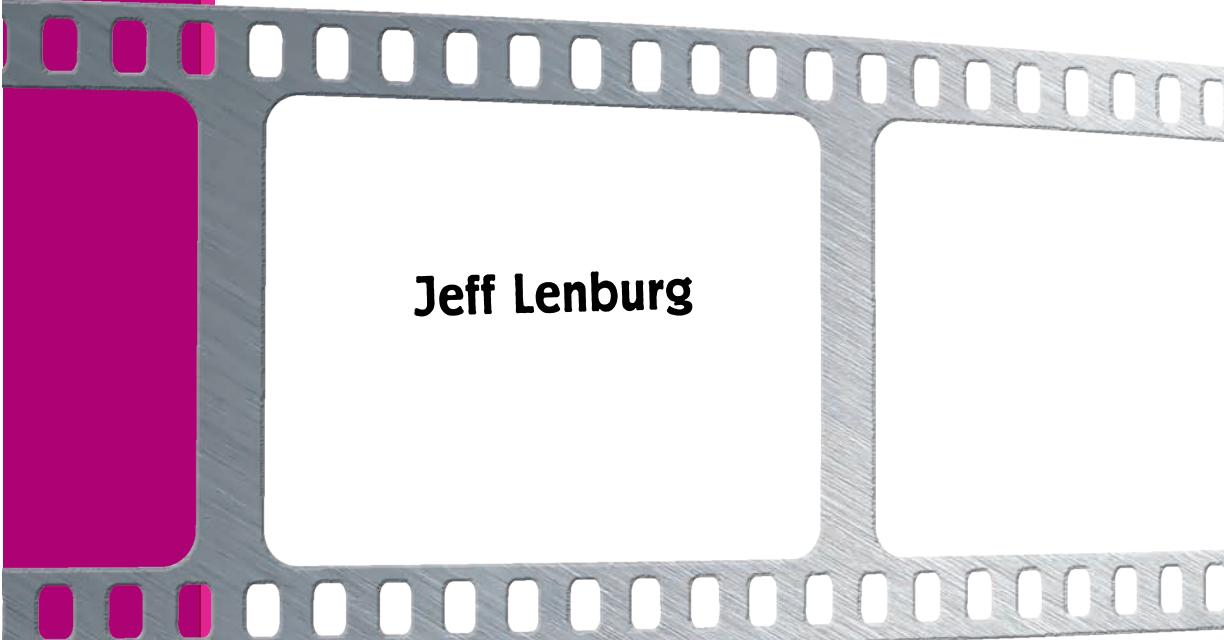
**Hayao Miyazaki:
Japan's Premier Anime Storyteller**

**Genndy Tartakovsky:
From Russia to Coming-of-Age Animator**

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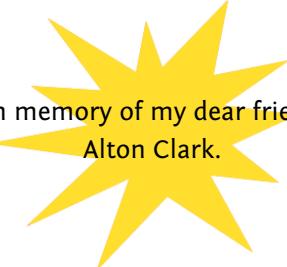
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In memory of my dear friend
Alton Clark.

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1

Becoming Master of His Universe

He is one of the world's most influential and most respected animation filmmakers. An animation magician and crowd-pleasing storyteller, his compelling characters, engaging stories, breathtaking animation, and outstanding attention to detail have propelled audiences into meticulously hand-drawn and engineered new worlds filled with imaginary aircraft, flights of fancy, lush, sweeping landscapes, ancient ruined castles, and eco-fantasy themes. In the world of manga he is like a god to his growing and devoted legion of followers, and the classic animated films that he has produced and directed have set box-office records and earned him widespread international acclaim. Furthermore, he has become a symbol of old-fashioned traditions and life-affirming messages and his work has bridged the gap between the western and Japanese cultures. He is Japan's most revered auteur and anime giant: Hayao Miyazaki.

Born on January 5, 1941, in the town of Akebono-cho in the Bunkyo-ku district of Tokyo, Japan, Hayao was the second eldest of four sons. He was raised by his father, Katsuji, and his mother, a strict, intellectual woman. He was preceded by his brother, Arata, born in July 1939, and followed by Yutaka, born in January 1944, and Shirou (birth date unknown). Their father, born in 1915, worked as the direc-

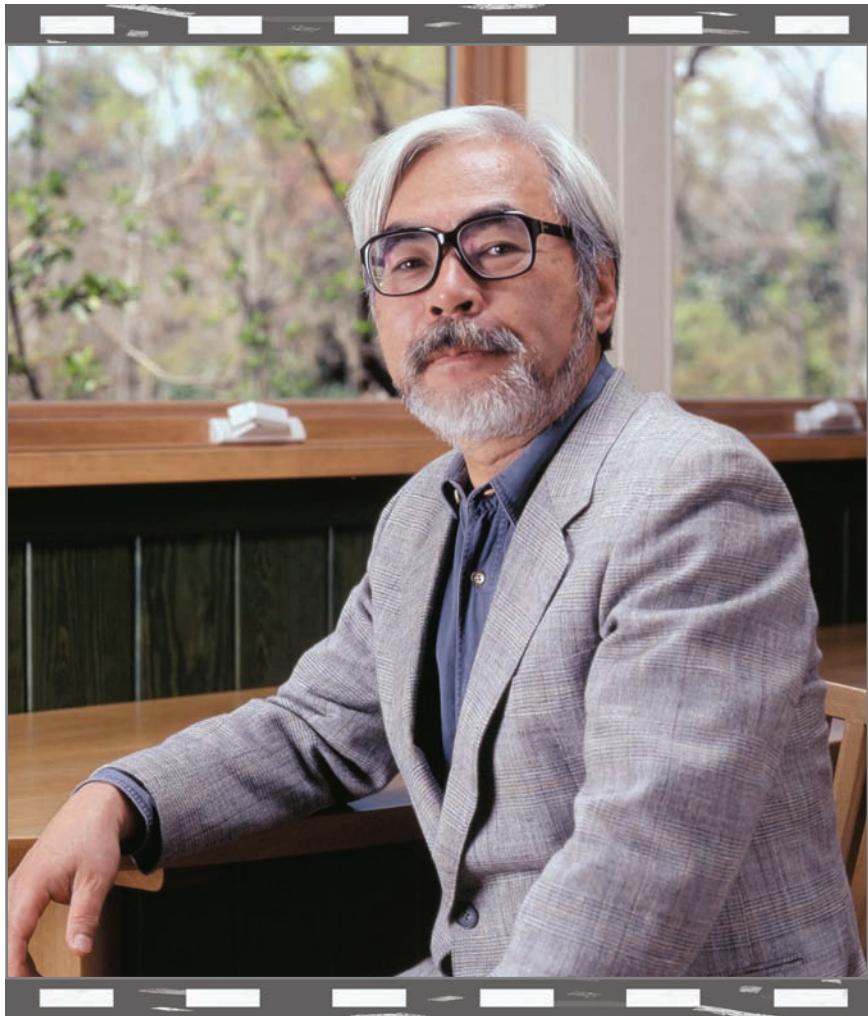
tor of the family firm, Miyazaki Airplane. Owned by Hayao's uncle, the company constructed and manufactured parts, such as rudders, for Japanese Zero fighter planes deployed in World War II. His father's background in aviation had a profound influence on Hayao. It became a source of his passion to draw airplanes in his youth and inspired his lifelong fascination with aviation, a penchant that later manifested as a recurring theme in his films. Later on his life, however, he admitted in interviews to feeling pangs of guilt over his father profiting from the war as a munitions engineer and for how comfortably they lived as a result.

Hayao's mother was a voracious reader who regularly questioned "socially accepted norms," traits that Hayao had in common with her as well as her curious and skeptical mind. Her endearing courage and energy likewise became associated with female characters typical of his films.

The war had a tremendous effect on the Miyazaki family and Hayao personally. When he was three years old, Katsuji evacuated the family to safer ground. To escape the United States's bombing of Tokyo and to be closer to the Miyazaki Airplane factory in Kanuma City, his father moved them to Utsunomiya City and Kanuma City in Tochigi Prefecture, where they resided from 1944 to 1946. It was clear to young Hayao at the time that he never wanted to pursue a career in mechanics like his father. As he recalled: "It was very useful during the war, but then the military aviation in Japan did not exist any more. And aluminum was used to make spoons and forks, [and] then my family worked in this industry. I hated the idea that the family of my father will earn money to make the war."

During this period Hayao got his first taste of the forest that later became an integral part of his animated film *My Neighbor Totoro*.

Hayao and his family moved three different times in his young life, from 1947 to 1952, and so he attended three different grade schools. He attended first through third grades at a school in Utsunomiya City. Next, he spent the fourth grade at Omiya Elementary School in Suginami-ku, in western Tokyo, when his family moved back to Suginami-ku. Hayao switched to the brand-new Eifuku Elementary



Hayao, the manga and anime virtuoso, poses for the camera.

School, which was a new branch of the Suginami-ku school, for the fifth grade.

The same year he started school, Hayao began the most difficult period of his young life as his mother became afflicted with spinal tuberculosis. This occurred during the reconstruction phase of Japan after the end of World War II. A woman of strong character and



intellectual interests, her illness had a big effect on Hayao and his family for protracted periods of time. Bedridden from 1947 to 1955, she was forced to spend three of the nine years largely hospitalized until she could be cared for at home. Consequently Hayao shared many domestic duties with his siblings during this experience that helped shape his personality and character. All of this took place as Hayao sought to find himself as a teenager and his path in life without following in his father's legacy. Despite her long illness, Hayao's mother played a significant role in forming her son's view of the world. Years later, in fact, he paid homage to his mother and his family's ordeal in *My Neighbor Totoro*, regarded by many critics as an "I story," or autobiographical story.

DEVELOPING HIS LOVE OF ANIME

During postwar Japan, Hayao developed an insatiable interest in comic books. Like many Japanese youths, he fancied to become a comic book artist and pursue a career as a manga author. A powerful role model and one of his primary inspirations was Osamu Tezuka. Japan's so-called manga god (as named by his legions of fans), he rose to stardom in 1947 with his seminal manga *New Treasure Island*, which resulted in a tidal wave of enthusiasm for this growing art form throughout the 1950s. Long remembered as the creator of *Astro Boy*, Tezuka helped change the impression of Japanese animation after he fathered the childish, cartoon-like art and distinctive large eyes that became the signature of anime films and television series in the 1960s and 1970s. His work influenced a wide range of genres during his illustrious career.

Describing the older artist's influence on his work, Hayao once wrote in an essay memorializing the legendary anime master: "When I was in both elementary and junior high school, I liked his manga the best of all the ones I read. The tragedies in his manga during the 1940s and 1950s—the early atomic era—were scary enough to make even a child shudder, they were so appalling."

Between 1953 and 1955, Hayao graduated from Eifuku Elementary and attended Omiya Junior High. A serious student and overly self-conscious, he had a hard time holding his own in fights with others,

but as he later stated, "My classmates eventually accepted me because I was good at drawing."

After graduating in 1958, Hayao attended Toyotama High, a public senior high school. The following year was one of the most pivotal in his young life: He rekindled his love of animation after seeing Japan's first color feature-length anime, *Legend of the White Serpent* (*Hakuja Den*, 1959). It was directed by anime legend Taiji Yabushita for Toei Doga studios. Feeling "a lot of pressure" studying for exams at the time, Hayao set his career path after watching the cartoon fantasy. Based upon a Chinese fable, this spectacle about a goddess who falls in love stirred his imagination and enthusiasm for the arts and thus his interest in animation.

Hayao later wrote, describing the deep feelings the film stirred in him: "I have to make an embarrassing confession. I fell in love with the heroine of a cartoon movie. My soul was moved . . . Maybe I was in a depressed state of mind because of the [university] entrance exams, or my underdeveloped adolescence, or cheap melodrama—it's easy to analyze and dismiss it, but the meeting with *Legend of the White Serpent* left a strong impress on my immature self."

Planning to become a writer of Japanese manga, Hayao concluded afterward that he wanted to instead become an animator, but he realized his abilities were unfortunately limited. After drawing planes, tanks, and battleships for many years, he could not draw people very well, a necessary asset if he want to work in animation.

In 1962, Hayao began his freshman year at the prestigious Gakushuin University, where he became a Marxist and went in an entirely different direction. He steered away from the arts to study political science and economics. There he majored in both and wrote his final thesis on "the theory of Japanese industry." They were hardly subjects dear to his heart or the path he truly wanted, which was working in cartoon graphics. So his interest in the arts remained high.

As he remembered in an interview: "I was a very bad student in economy because I devoted all my time to the drawing since eighteen years of age. But it is as of college that I wanted to make animation, without however knowing well to draw. I did not want to go to the art



schools to learn the technique because I did not like to study. On the other hand, I chose the faculty of economy because it was the only department of the university where one did not need to work much! That enabled me to have four years of freedom with a minimum of studies, and much time for creation."

Hayao kept his passion for the arts alive, however. He joined the Children's Literature Research Society, one of the university's many clubs and societies and the closest thing back then to a comics club. He derived great pleasure and inspiration from his involvement in the group that read children's books and comics, including those by many European authors. As a result, he was exposed to varying examples of fantasy and legend by some of Britain's greatest storytellers, including Rosemary Sutcliff, Philippa Pearce, and Eleanor Farjeon, and French writers like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, best remembered for his popular novella *The Little Prince*. These and the works of other masters of classic children's literature played a major role in shaping Hayao's storytelling and character development.

TURNING TO ANIMATION

Graduating in 1963 with degrees in economics and political science, Hayao decided to seek an academic post or a position in the business world rather than to pursue a career in the arts. As he declared in an interview, "At the time, I was firmly decided to create cartoon films, but I realized that I did not have the capacity of it."

That April he joined the staff of Toei Doga Co. Ltd. (later known as Toei Animation), Japan's largest producer of theatrical motion pictures and television anime. He was hired along with his future partner Isao Takahata and moved into a modest apartment in close proximity to the studio in nearby Nerima-ku, Tokyo. Earning 19,500 yen a month, his rent consumed about a third of his salary—6,000 yen a month.

After three months of training, Hayao was put to work as an inbetweener on his first full-length feature, *Watchdog Woof-Woof (Wan Wan Chushingura)*, released later that year. He also worked on Toei's first made-for-television series, the 86-episode animated fantasy-adventure

Wolf Boy Ken (Okami Shonen Ken). Directed by Sadao Tsukioka, it began airing on Japanese television that November.

Hayao's longtime hero Osamu Tezuka founded Toei. He initiated a standardized system that was used in animating all of the studio's productions, which were kept to a weekly schedule that adhered to limited budgets. Thus drawings and cels were rendered at a rate that kept them to a minimum during a 26-minute cartoon episode and eliminated extra, more elaborate movements, such as facial expressions, small gestures, and big, flashy sequences, associated with bigger budgeted and more richly animated features. On the job, Hayao learned the basics, including how to accurately draw characters with great precision. His task was to fill in the cel-by-cel movements of characters and objects by producing inbetween drawings—first and final drawings—that fit between each key frame of animation and the action or movement in each scene as drawn by a senior animator. For someone of his natural intellectual intensity and passion, he found the work menial and unsatisfying. He was interested in doing much more expressive, fuller animation to develop a character and was concerned that the studio's movement toward doing more television productions meant his chances to work on feature films would become "scarce." Making his probation after three months, nonetheless, he believed that animation could be stimulating for him.

Not long after joining Toei Doga, he and his fellow animators walked out following a major union dispute with the studio, with Hayao leading the demonstrators. His engagement in trade-union activities escalated as he became a strong believer in union oversight in the workplace, and he quickly became a leader in the animators' union. In fact, in 1964, he was voted chief secretary of Toei Doga's labor union with his friend and fellow colleague Isao Takahata serving as vice-chairman.

That same year Hayao met fellow animator Akemi Ota. He became smitten and he courted her. Over time, their relationship deepened and eventually he married her and started a family.

After working at Toei for one year, however, Hayao questioned whether he should continue working as an animator and almost abandoned his new career. His feelings changed after the animator's union

hosted a screening in 1964 of the Russian-made classic feature *The Snow Queen* (*Snezhnaya koroleva*). The film had been produced in 1957 and directed by Russia's foremost animation director Lev Atamanov. Hayao found it moving. Afterward he decided to keep working on animation "with renewed determination," as he once said. Hayao learned from watching the film that cartoon characters can act if they are well animated and animation can move people like other media does. Other foreign films he saw later, such as famed French animator Paul Grimault's *La Bergère et le Ramoneur* (*The Shepherdess and the Chimneysweep*), based on the fairy tale of the same name by Hans Christian Andersen, impressed him and served as further validation of his vocation.

Though he was merely an inbetweener, Hayao impressed his fellow colleagues with his drawing ability, fertile imagination, and abundance of story ideas. After only a few months on the job, he left his mark on the production of a new sci-fi/fantasy feature, *Gulliver's Space Travels* (*Gulliver no Uchu Rkyoko*). It was one of Toei's first to depart from traditional Asian folklore and was made more like a typical Disney animated film with memorable and happy, snappy songs. The 80-minute children's film was released in Japan in March 1965 and distributed the following July in the United States, dubbed and re-titled as *Gulliver's Travels Beyond the Moon*. The story also borrows elements of Hans Christian Andersen's tales, including "Little Match Girl." Made to appeal to a more juvenile audience, its plot is simple and far-fetched: a homeless boy, Ted (Ricky in the America version), inspired by the exploits of the famed heroic explorer, meets a much older Gulliver in the flesh. Now a scientist, he is busy building a spacecraft, with plans to lead a team of young explorers to explore the Milky Way and the distant Star of Hope, and he hopes to save a kingdom of dolls enslaved by evil robots.

The American version performed no better than previous Toei Animation features in the United States, but Hayao distinguished himself from many of his colleagues during his involvement on the project. From the start, he worked decisively with a strong vision of his work, creative eagerness, and combative obstinacy that stood out from others. As a young animator, he was not impressed with the screenplay's original ending. He was a great believer in "the power of the story," as

he called it, and went straight to the film's director to propose ways to improve it. In the original script, Gulliver was supposed to rescue a robot princess of Robot Country. Hayao modified the finale whereby the inhabitants of the world were not robots but humans trapped inside their metal shells. At the end, the robot princess breaks from her shell to reveal she is human and is rescued. The new ending changed the nature of the film and its underlying message: Instead of defeating the robot army, Gulliver and his band rescue them as people and save their humanity. Though his contributions to the screenplay went uncredited, Hayao drew praise for his storytelling ability.

Despite his success on the feature, Hayao was kept on as an inbeteener. He worked in this capacity on a second television series, *Wind Ninja Boy Fujimaru* (*Shonen Ninja Kaze no Fujimaru*), before he was finally promoted to animator. Based on the manga by Sanpei Shirato, the 65-episode anime series debuted on Japanese television in June of that year.

During the first few years of Hayao's employment, Toei Doga studios featured a staff of around 350 workers, including 90 inbetteeners. When they began producing animated television series, the operation of the studio evolved. The staff mushroomed to 500, work intensified, and the productions Hayao was associated with became, as he said, "more standardized and I knew that under these conditions, I could never work on a film like the *Queen of Snows*. The demands of television were very keen, one felt in a hurry by time, and that decreased the artistic ambition. Work was arranged very hierarchically and the teams often changed."

MOVING UP

In 1965, Hayao was elevated to animator on the new black-and-white Japanese anime television series *Hustle Punch*. The series was about a brave bear, Punch, who defends his friends, a mouse, Touch, and a weasel, Bun, from a bad wolf named Dr. Garigari. The 26-episode program premiered on Japanese television that November and ran through the following April. He did the key animation on each episode of the series



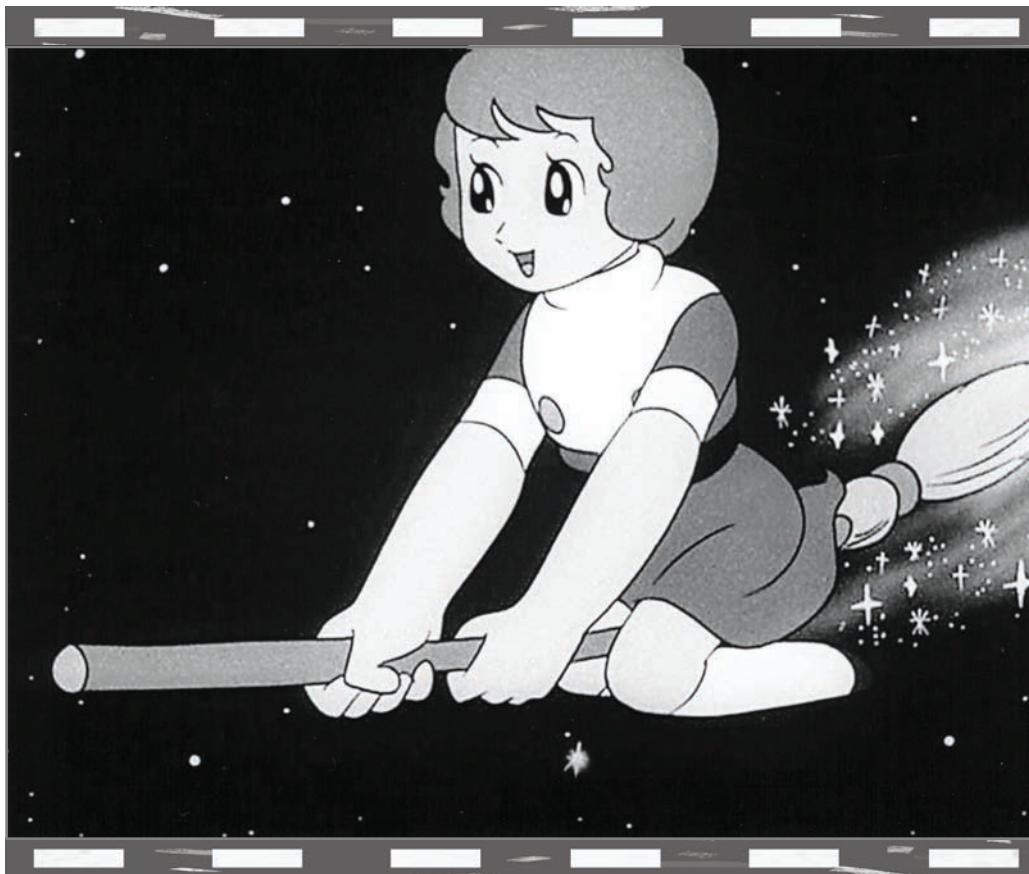
alongside Takahata, who worked as the opening sequence director on the series. Shortly thereafter, Hayao again served as an animator on his fourth television series, *Rainbow Warrior Robin* (*Rainbow Sentai Robin*). Adapted from the manga by Shotaro Ishinomori, it followed the story of a daring band of friends who defend Earth from invaders from the star Parta.

By now a chief animation and concept artist for the studio, that fall, Hayao offered to help Takahata after joining the production team of the studio's full-length film—one that would become a landmark anime and emblematic Japanese film of the 1960s—*The Adventures of Hols, Prince of the Sun* (*Taiyou no Oji Hols no Daiboken*), also known under various titles, including *The Little Norse Prince* or *Little Norse Prince Valiant*. Convinced that this was his "last chance" to work on an animated feature before television took over, Hayao agreed to work on the movie with Takahata, the film's director, and Yasuo Otsuka, the movie's animation director, with the understanding they took as long as necessary to complete the film together. Consequently Hayao played a major role in the movie's development. It also marked the first of many collaborations between him and Takahata during the next three decades. (Takahata later served as the producer for some of Hayao's own movies.)

In October 1965, after his career progressed and he found time, Hayao exchanged wedding vows in a beautiful ceremony with Akemi. After honeymooning, the newlyweds moved to Higashi-Murayama City, in Tokyo.

In January 1967, Hayao and Akemi became parents following the birth of their first son, Goro, who later would become a landscape designer and designed the garden on the rooftop of Studio Ghibli. Hayao admits that having children changed him. After becoming a father, he always tried to produce anime that pleased his children while they were growing up.

In 1968, Hayao worked as a key animator on two episodes (number 77 and 80) of his sixth anime television series, the all black-and-white *Little Witch Sally* (*Mahotsukai Sally*). The first series was based on the manga by Mitsuteru Yokoyama (which Yokoyama admitted was inspired by the American television sitcom, *Bewitched*), it was directed



In the early days of his career, Hayao animated two episodes of the black-and-white anime series *Little Witch Sally* in 1968. It was the first based on the manga by Mitsuteru Yokoyama and was inspired by the American television sitcom *Bewitched*. © Toei Animation

by Yoshiyuki Hane and had begun airing on Japanese television in 1966. Each episode followed the misadventure of the so-called princess of the witch world, Sally, who teleports herself to Earth and, like the Samantha Stevens character in *Bewitched*, tries hiding her supernatural abilities but uses them at times when she sees fit.

Finally, on July 21, 1968, after three years in the making, *The Adventures of Hols: Prince of the Sun* was released to theaters in Japan. Shaped



by the youthful Marxism of Hayao and his colleagues, the film's story celebrated unity among people and was produced democratically, with many crew members contributing ideas.

That same year, Hayao produced key animation, plus designs, storyboards, and story ideas for important scenes, including the climatic chase scene for a second anime feature, *Puss in Boots* (*Nagagutsu o Haita Neko*). Regarded by many as a masterpiece of comedy animation in Japan, it was directed by Kimi Yabuki with his longtime mentor and collaborator Yasuji Mori, who supervised animation. Famous Japanese playwright Hisashi Inoue penned the screenplay. Hayao's wife, Akemi, also worked as an animator on the production. The film served as a prototype for Hayao's later feature *The Castle of Cagliostro*.

In 1969, under the pseudonym Akitsu Saburo, Hayao drew his first manga, called *Desert Tribe* (*Sabaku no tami*), for a newspaper targeting children. Serialized as 26 individual strips, the surprisingly dark story dealt with sheepherders battling to survive after the devastation of war in 11th century Central Asia. The art style of his manga demonstrated the influence of Osama Tezuka in his work. The strip also served as a prototype for his most acclaimed manga authored under his real name, *Nausicaä*.

To promote his upcoming film *Puss in Boots*, Hayao also wrote and illustrated a comic version of the movie whose main character was the cat, Pero, and later became Toei's mascot. Serialized in *Chunichi* newspaper Sunday edition, it became his first of many authored mangas. His venture in doing comic strips, or mangas, was purely accidental. "For me, to make cinema, it is to create space and time," Hayao once said. "I made a comic strip of *Nausicaä* because I did not have work with the cinema! And then one proposed to me to carry out cartoon films."

Not long after working on *Puss in Boots*, Hayao contributed material to the screenplay for a third anime feature, *The Flying Ghost Ship*, in which panic breaks out in downtown Tokyo after military tanks roll into the city. He storyboarded and animated the scenes that he wrote while Akemi also contributed as an animator on the project. The film is an early example of what writer Dani Cavallaro calls Hayao's "abhorrence of military violence and totalitarian control." Hayao dramatized

this in two sequences that he proposed and animated. One sequence features tanks motoring and firing upon downtown Tokyo.

That April, Hayao and Akemi's second son, Keisuke, was born, whereupon the Miyazakis moved to Oizumi-Gakuen, Nerima-ku, Tokyo. Their second son eventually went to Sinshu University to study forestry (or dendrology). Many years later, Keisuke made the woodcut print "Craftsman Making a Violin in Prison," which the character Shizuku saw in a book in the anime film *Whisper of the Heart* that Hayao produced later. In 1970, the Miyazakis moved to Tokorozawa City, in Saitama Prefecture.

Despite his many successes by then, Hayao remained restless. He was determined to do more with his talent and craft, and sought to fulfill his true potential.





Realizing His True Potential

Hayao's forthcoming decision to leave Toei Doga was not done hastily. It had been in the works for some time. After building his reputation as an animator, he and Takahata were both dissatisfied with the lack of creative autonomy at the studio. Their subsequent departures were motivated by the absence of prospects at the studio and confrontations with the studio heads over the commercial failure of the full-length feature *The Adventures of Hols, Prince of the Sun*.

Even then Hayao was characteristically modest when it came to talking about himself and his talent. As he later stated, "I'm not a storyteller. I draw pictures."

Hayao took an active role in the realization of the movie and was equally displeased with the outcome and the overall studio atmosphere. He no longer found it a good fit for his talent. By then he had established himself as an outstanding background-scene artist for both motion pictures and television animation. Throughout the 1970s, in addition to motion pictures, he worked on manga, or graphic novels.

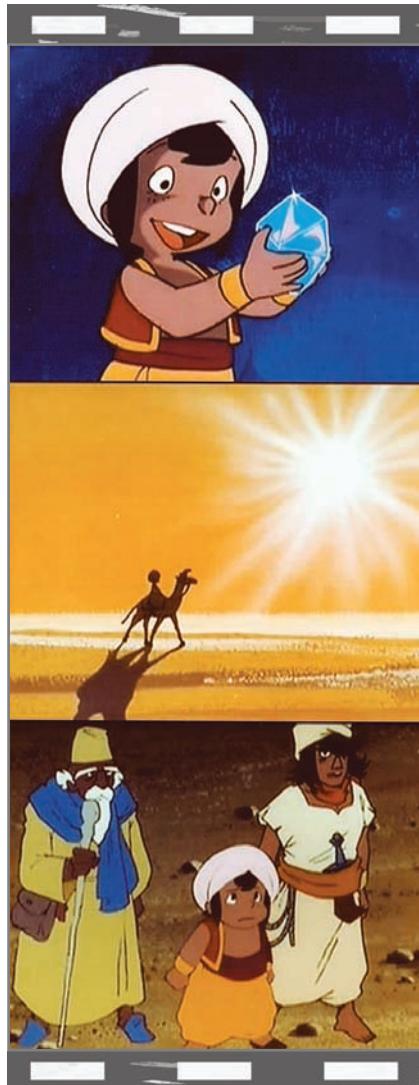
In 1971, Hayao played a major role in developing designs, structures, and characters, as well as storyboarding and doing key animation for two full-length animes. The first was a comedy adventure film based on Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novel *Treasure Island*, called *Animal*

Treasure Island (*Dobutsu Takarajima*). Issued on March 20 to theaters in Japan, the movie, starring mostly an all-animal cast except for human stars Jim and Kathy, featured prototypes of distinctive elements and characterizations that later became common in feature-length films Hayao directed. These included a tenacious, dauntless heroine (Kathy) and a mean-looking pig (Captain John Silver), an early version of his later aviating character Porco.

The other film to which Hayao brought his distinctive creative flair was *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves* (*Aribaba to Yonjuppiki no Tozoku*). Released on July 18, this 55-minute comedy farce, adapted from the classic children story from the *Arabian Nights*, was a huge departure from Hayao's earlier anime work. Featuring his more cartoonish designs and backgrounds, it demonstrated his innate choreographic ability and humor.

SEEKING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

After these productions, Hayao left Toei Doga. He joined Takahata



Hayao played a hand as a key animator and organizer of animation for Toei's 1971 theatrical feature *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves*, adapted from the fable in *One Thousand and One Nights*.
© Toei Animation



and animation counterpart Yoichi Otabe at a competing studio, A-Pro, to produce an animated television series adaptation of Astrid Lindgren's famed character, *Pippi Longstocking*. Takahata did preliminary work on the series, and Hayao traveled to Sweden with Yutaka Fujioka, president of Tokyo Movie Shinsha, who was seriously interested in producing the series, to secure the rights to the character. After a return visit, the final crushing blow was the refusal of Lindgren to award them the rights to the project.

Work and preparations for the project, however, did not go to waste. Developing the concept, screenplay, set design, and key animation, Hayao used the material to shape two remarkable theatrical shorts he made with Takahata: *The Adventures of Panda and Friends (Panda Kopanda)*, released in December 1972 and *Panda & Child: Rainy Day Circus (Panda Kopanda: Amefuri Saakasu no Maki)*, released the following March. In September 1972, Hayao initiated production of the first short at the height of the panda craze in Japan and after the government announced a pair of giant pandas were being loaned from China to Tokyo's Ueno Zoo as part of what they called Panda diplomacy.

The first 30-minute film, also known as *Panda! Go Panda!*, follows the adventures of a little girl, Mimiko, who is left by herself by her Grandma when she is away, and a big, warm, and fuzzy papa panda, Papanda-san, and his cute baby panda, Kopanda, come to visit. With her Grandma's house being made of bamboo, they decide to stay and live with her and become one big happy family.

Considered a prototype for Hayao's later feature, *My Neighbor Totoro*, it was the first anime Hayao made specifically for children, including his own. He later made *Totoro* because he wanted to make such a movie again. In fact, with his round design and big smile, Papanda-san resembles Totoro, and Mimiko is like the pigtailed Mei in the later feature.

Constrained to doing television work for Tokyo Movie Shinsha, Hayao and Takahata codirected their first anime series together for the studio, *Lupin III (Lupin Sansei)*. Originally begun as a movie project in 1969, the series followed a crime-loving, green-jacketed thief, Arsène Lupin III, and his gang pursued by an inspector who is determined to bring them to justice. Yasuo Otsuka, who left Toei to join A-Pro,



In 1972, on the heels of a panda craze in Japan, Hayao wrote the first of two theatrical shorts featuring the adventures of a father and cub panda and their young human friend, *The Adventures of Panda and Friends* (also known as *Panda! Go Panda!*). (Courtesy: TMS Entertainment) © Tokyo Movie Sinsha

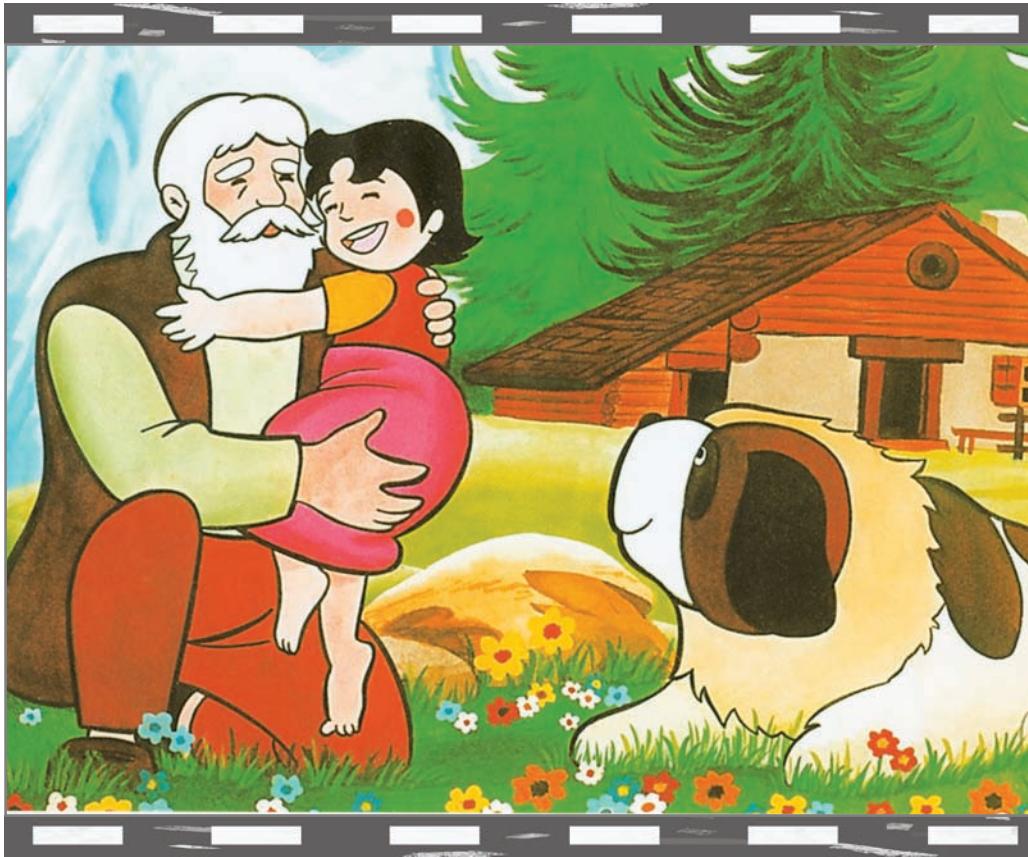


designed the series. It became the first Japanese anime series, due to its unusual level of sex and violence, openly intended for adolescent audiences. On October 24, 1971, *Lupin III* began airing on YTV in Japan. The original 23-episode series aired until March 26, 1972. The show was pretty faithful to the original manga written and illustrated by Kazuhiko Kato under the pen name of Monkey Punch as a parody of James Bond. Masaaki Osumi helmed the first seven episodes and the series was not immediately popular. Resulting from low ratings, Hayao and Takahata were brought on board to tone down the show's violent content and play up its humor in the form of a parody. Still keeping the show pretty real and a cross between hard-boiled and lightheartedly goofy, they worked their magic directing 17 of the series' 23 episodes together, alone, or with another director.

Hayao also animated another series that premiered on Japanese television in October 1971. He had drawn the storyboards for the first episode but they were not used. *The Impudent Frog* (*Dokonjo Gaeru*) was a 103-episode series about a frog (Pyonkichi) reincarnated as a character printed on the front of a T-shirt worn by a middle schooler, Hiroshi (who accidentally squashed him to death in the first place). The frog gives Hiroshi sage advice. The series lasted for three seasons until September 1974.

At this stage of his career, Hayao again became restless. He revived his aspirations to do his own cutting-edge features instead of being limited to doing only television, but once again temporarily put them on hold. That June, after completing key animation of one episode (#15) for Tokyo Movie Shinsha's latest anime series, *Wilderness Boy Isamu* (*Koya no Shonen Isamu*), he and Takahata and Otabe jumped ship. After doing key animation of the first episode of a new sports series for Eiken, *Samurai Giants*, which debuted that October, they quit A-Pro and landed at Zuiyo Pictures.

During the next five years Hayao was actively engaged in developing new episodes for what would become a staple of Japanese television showcasing cartoon versions of different classic books or stories each year, *World Masterpiece Theater* (*Sekai Meisaku Gekijou*). As a scene designer and scene organizer, he helped create the series episode *Alpine*



Hayao created scene designs and layouts for this 1974 episode, *Alpine Girl Heidi*, for the popular Japanese television series, *World Masterpiece Theatre*, based on Johanna Spyri's famous children's novel, *Heidi*. © Zuiyo Pictures

Girl Heidi (Alps no Shojo Heidi), which Takahata directed, based on the novel, *Heidi*, by Johanna Spyri. That July, Hayao went on location to Switzerland to accurately depict the rugged beauty and lush landscape in his designs. On January 6, 1974, the finished episode premiered on Japanese television.

Working on the series corresponded with Hayao's and Takahata's aspirations at the time of changing studios and doing an adaptation of Spyri's work. It also helped Zuiyo Pictures give birth thereafter to



the Japanese animation studio, Nippon Animation. The core technical team for the series, which began on Japanese television in 1969, was Takahata, Hayao, and another companion, Yōichi Kotabe, working together in the creation of the characters and the direction of the animation. As Hayao later said, “When I created with collaborators the *Heidi* series, the child of the Alps, in 1974, we realized that to create the concept and the drawing of a series, one needed an authoritative capacity of three people.”

Thus, in carrying out the series, Hayao and company kept effective control over the quality of the unit and animation this way. By employing their own centralized working system for animating episodes, animation was divided into three or four parts of equivalent length (and some work that was subcontracted), to animate a series on a weekly assembly down to the smallest detail. The principal problem was the brevity of the deadlines each week. Hayao charged himself with the “scenic construction” and “graphic structure” of the series. Out of the trio he made Takahata responsible for giving body to the setting in each scene with a tangible form. For each episode, all three of them composed hundreds of plans regarding the precise structure. Hayao, a meticulous maniac in his directives, delivered the layouts already comprised of several successful drawings according to such plans.

In 1975, for a coproduction between Zuiyo Eizo, Nippon Animation Co., Ltd. (a descendant of Zuiyo Eizo after being split into two companies that year: Zuiyo and Nippon Animation), and Tokyo Movie Shinsha, Hayao handled key animation for one episode (#15), directed by Kenji Kodama and Isao Takahata, for the *Dog of Flanders* (*Flanders no Inu*) television series. Part of the *World Masterpiece Theater* series, it was broadcast on Japanese television between January and December 1975.

Shortly thereafter Hayao again went on location, this time to Italy and Argentina, to prepare for his work in designing scenes and layouts for his third animated television series—again part of the *World Masterpiece Theater*—*Three Thousand Miles in Search of Mother* (*Haha o Tazunete Sanzen-Ri*). Directed by Takahata, the program, based on the novel by Edmondo de Amicis, lasted one full season of 51 episodes from January

4 to December 26, 1976, and was produced under the banner of Nippon Animation.

In 1977, Hayao contributed key animation on a fourth animated series, *Rascal the Raccoon* (*Araiguma Rascal*), produced for the *World Masterpiece Theater* series. Adapted from autobiographical stories of his childhood by Sterling North, Hayao provided animation on 20 of the series' 52 episodes, which ran for a full season from January 2 to December 25 of that year.

TAKING THE HELM

A year later, Hayao broke out in a big way after he was given a chance to create a production of his own that indulged his passions and examined his complex world view. Once again turning his attention to Japanese television, he was promoted to director and created character designs, mechanical designs, layouts, and storyboards, and directed all but two episodes of the classic 26-episode anime series *Future Boy Conan* (also known as *Conan, Boy in the Future*). Based on Alexander Key's children's novel *The Incredible Tide*, the color series—also directed by Isao Takahata and Tatsuo Ayakawa, with characters designed by Yasuo Otsuka—is set in a futuristic world after the destruction of Earth after World War III. Among the sole survivors left on an island are a grandfather and a virtuous, brave boy (Conan) who meets a young girl (Lana). Afterward, their adventure begins as they regain weapons of lost technology used for war and together try to regenerate the planet.

Debuting on April 4, 1978, on Japan's NHK network and airing every Tuesday, *Future Boy Conan* became Hayao's most popular television work and the first that gave him a feeling of achievement. The series' central themes of industrialization, balance, and oppression were reminiscent of his later full-length feature *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*. The series was an early example of characterizations that recurred throughout his later work: a girl who is in touch with nature, a warrior woman who appears menacing but is not an antagonist, and a boy who seems destined for the girl. Likewise, many of Hayao's imaginative aircraft designs were featured throughout each episode.





In 1978, Hayao directed his first series for Japan television, the post-futuristic *Future Boy Conan*. © Nippon Animation

In 1979, Hayao partnered with Takahata on their last television series for Nippon Animation, *Anne of Green Gables* (*Akage no An*). The program was based on the popular novels by Lucy Maud Montgomery and was produced under the *World Masterpiece Theater* umbrella. It premiered on Japanese television that December. Hayao returned to familiar ground, handling layouts, scene designs, and scene organization of only the series' first 15 episodes. Hoping to realize his aspiration of producing and directing animated features, he left the series in the middle of production. Ready and eager, the 38-year-old animator could not wait to show what he could do in an extended format for the big

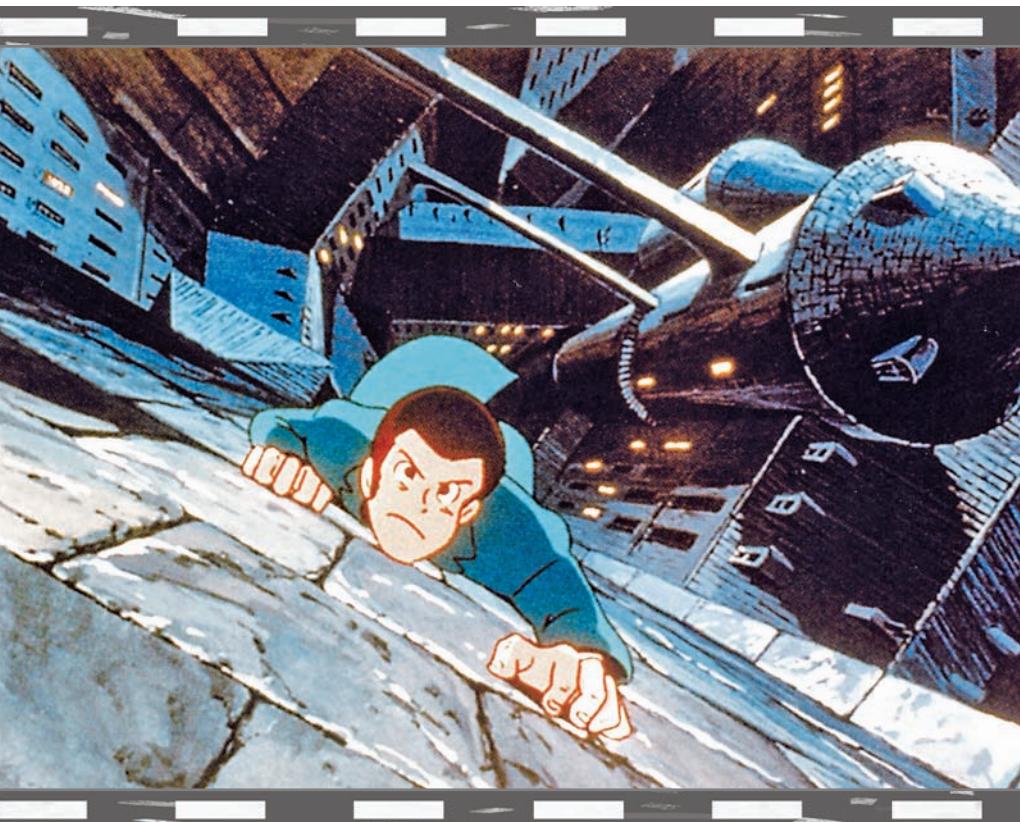
screen. Instead of producing and directing stories and characters of his own, which came later, he joined his fourth studio, Tokyo Movie Shinsha, to direct his first feature anime, *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (*Lupin III Cagliostro no Shiro*).

With preproduction work commencing in May and animation in July of that year, *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* became Hayao's first important full-length feature that he cowrote, storyboarded, and directed. His second animated *Lupin III* production since his widely popular 1971 television series and arguably his most famous, the movie was produced on a relatively small budget and completed by the end of November, only seven months from conception. Produced by Haruya Yamazaki, it exhibited Hayao's meticulous attention to detail and elegant design that are signatures of his later films.

On December 15, 1979, Japanese audiences were treated to Hayao's film directorial debut when *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* opened nationwide. Released by Toho Co., this edgy and entertaining cartoon feature stars the venerable thief, Lupin III, who uncovers a counterfeiting operation and solves a centuries-old mystery. The fabulous 100-minute action yarn offers an exciting delicacy of colors, visual styles, cultural references, high-tech gimmicks, lush detailed landscapes, grand elegant settings, and an outstanding attention to detail that make this an enviable first effort. Enjoying the same pop sensibility that turned many other anime films of its time, like *Akira*, into cult favorites, the key figure in the story is the genial thief, the Wolf, who falls in love with a snub-nosed, blue-eyed princess in this slapstick fairy tale whose English-dubbed dialogue has a martial arts style flair ("Freeze, female rat!" "My sword is thirsty tonight!").

American audiences were given a taste of Hayao's first filmic triumph during a special premiere of *Lupin III* in September 1980, at the World Science Fiction Convention in Boston. It would not be until April 3, 1991, however, that an English-dub was released to theaters in the United States through Streamline Pictures. Critics were generally glowing in their praise, with some exceptions. Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* gave the film a mixed review. As she offered: "This one should fare nearly as well with animation fans of any age, provided they are





Hayao made his feature-film directorial debut in 1979 with the James Bond parody based on his popular 1971 television series *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*. (Courtesy: TMS Entertainment) © Monkey Punch/Tokyo Movie Shinsha

unwavering in their devotion to the form and do not think 100 minutes is an awfully long time." Nicole Armour of *Film Comment* added that "Hayao's attention to detail is astonishing, most notably in the Count's castle, a maze of tunnels, towers and detours, where fight scenes carry us from its rooftops to its elaborate duct system, all executed with cunning."

After directing the anime feature, Hayao left to become a chief instructor for new animators at Telecom. It was during this transitional time in his life that he used his company's name as a pseudonym to

direct two episodes of the then-current *Lupin III* cartoon series, episode 145, "Albatross Wings of Death" ("Shi no Tsubasa"), and 155, "Aloha Lupin" ("Saraba Itoshiki Lupin Yo"), which completed its three-year run that October on Japanese television.

Soon new opportunities would beckon and his best work was about to come.





Emerging Into an Anime Auteur

Up until this point, every production Hayao had undertaken for other studios had been either as a team member or house director developing characters invented by others. Then, in 1980, he took a detour into the world of manga. After the Japanese magazine *Animage* invited him, he created his most popular manga series, *Nausicaä*, about a princess living in the future where humanity is in peril of extinction.

Hayao only started drawing the manga because, as he stated, "I was unemployed as an animator, so I'll stop drawing it as soon as I find animation work." As a result, he stopped and started work on his epic series many times as opportunities came his way. In the interim Hayao hired himself out to work on various animated productions for film and television produced during the next two years. The first was the anime television series *New Adventures of Gigantor* (*Tetsujin 28-Go*) for Hikari Productions, debuting on Japanese television that October. Hayao did key animation for one episode (#8) for this updated full-color adventure series of a giant robot and his young master made famous in the black-and-white original that aired on Japanese and U.S. television in the 1960s.

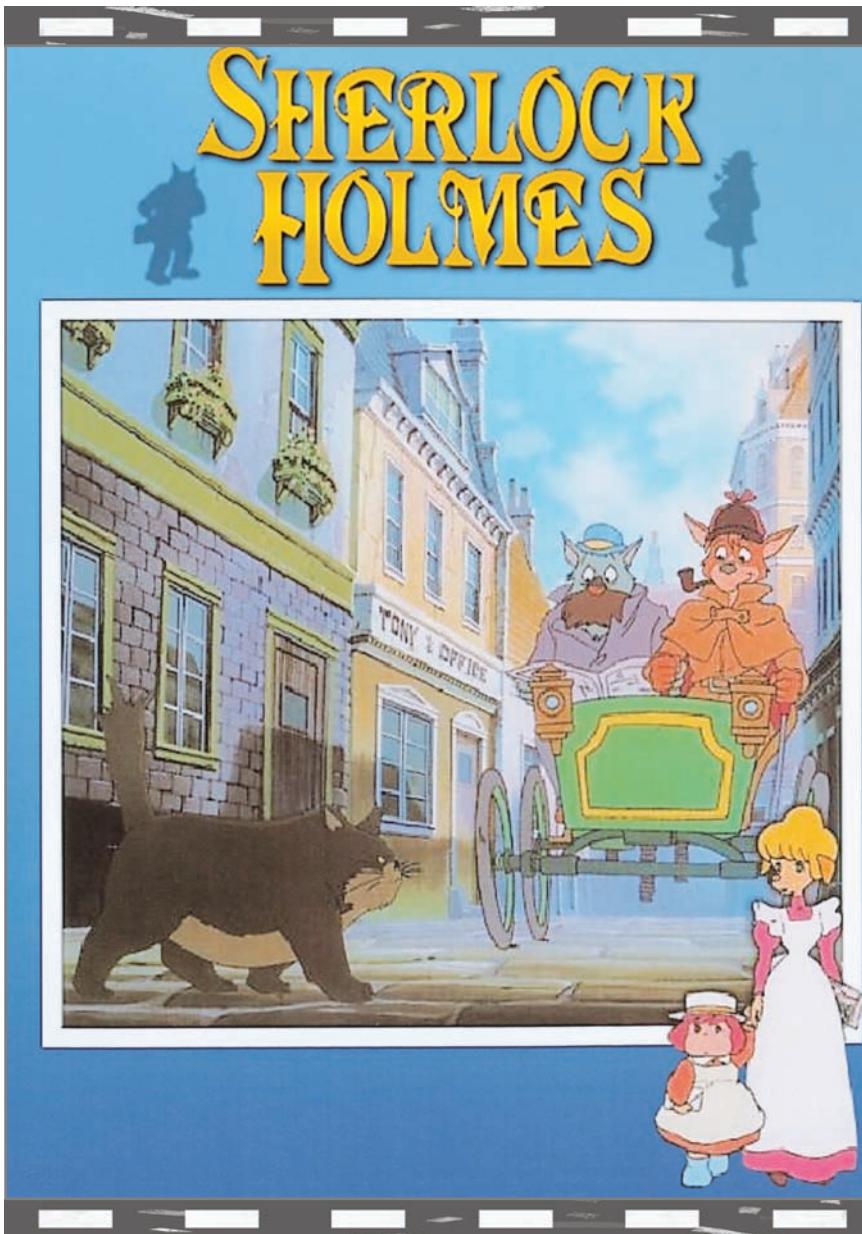
In 1981, Hayao then teamed up with Takahata, who was hired to oversee Japanese preproduction for Tokyo Movie Shinsha's new

full-length fantasy feature, *Little Nemo*. He worked as scene designer on the film, but Takahata left the project over creative differences. The project was later completed and directed by American director William T. Hurtz and Japanese director Masami Hata and released to theaters in Japan in 1989 and in the United States two years later.

Later in 1981, Hayao was brought on board to direct an Italian-Japanese television series based on the novels of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, called *Sherlock Hound* (*Meitanei Holmes*). Also released as either *Famous Detective Holmes* or *Detective Holmes*, and the 1984 compilation feature, *Great Detective Holmes*, this coproduction between Japan's Tokyo Movie Shinsha and the Italian public broadcasting corporation RAI recast the infamous Scotland Yard detective Sherlock Holmes as a hound, with all the other characters depicted as dogs. Hayao directed only the first six episodes as the series encountered production delays and setbacks due to problems with Doyle's estate that led to the production being suspended. By the time producers had resolved these matters, Hayao had moved on to other projects. Thus the remaining episodes were directed by Kyosuke Mikuriya. As a result, production was not completed until two years later. In 1983, it was first shown on Italian television and also aired on British and U.S. television. From November 6, 1984, to May 20, 1985, the entire 26-episode series was broadcast in Japan on TV Asahi.

The following year Hayao assisted or provided key animation on two productions. The first was *Zorro* (*Kaiketsu Zorro*), an animated television series version of the popular masked character alias Don Diego de la Vega fighting evil in his homeland. It was never shown in Japan after its completion. The other was the 99-minute full-length anime *Space Adventures Cobra*, based on the manga and the 1982 anime television series by Buichi Terasawa for Tokyo Movie Shinsha studios.

That February, serialization of Hayao's more than 1,000-page, four-volume, postapocalyptic manga, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no Tani no Nausicaä*), began running in *Animage* magazine with an English translation version published by Viz Comics. Set 1,000 years after the "Seven Days of Fire," the futuristic series followed the adventures of Nausicaä, a teenage warrior princess from a small kingdom at war



Promotional artwork for the Italian-Japanese coproduction Hayao directed, *Sherlock Holmes* (re-titled from its original title, *Sherlock Hound*), based on the novels of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Originally produced in 1981, it was released on television three years later. (Courtesy DIVX)

with a mighty empire with an environmental apocalypse threatening humankind. Nausicaä seeks a way for both nations to coexist peacefully. Between 1982 and 1984, *Nausicaä* sold more than 10 million copies. (Hayao later wrote and illustrated three additional volumes in the series that were serialized in the early 1990s.)

BRINGING A MANGA PRINCESS TO THE SCREEN

Well before its publication, Hayao had developed the *Nausicaä* story into a movie proposal. The editors of *Animage* approached him right after he directed *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*, to do a feature article about him and his work. During their discussions he showed them some drawings for his proposed movie project. Hayao agreed to do it as a comic strip for *Animage* instead under the condition that he could choose the story and suspend or end it whenever he accepted film offers, and that they would not use his manga as the basis for an animated project. However, they later approached him about producing it as a short 15-minute film. He declined, but offered to work on a 60-minute original animation video instead.

In 1981, *Animage* submitted Hayao's ideas on his behalf to their parent company, Tokuma Shoten. Most were rejected, but a few were later used in his feature-length adaptation of *Nausicaä*. After Tokuma countered with an offer to sponsor a theatrical feature, the film version was born. Hayao inked a deal to adapt his *Nausicaä* stories into a big-screen animated feature. The manga's first 16 chapters—or first two volumes—served as the basis for the movie; the book series remained incomplete until after the film's release.

At the end of May 1983, preproduction work commenced on Hayao's epic film version with animation entering production in early August. He brought in his former producing partner Takahata to produce the film and chose Topcraft as the production studio. Even then, getting Takahata to come aboard took some persuading. Though he greatly respected Takahata's abilities, Hayao admitted to YOM magazine, "Our thoughts about moviemaking are completely different. If we discuss a production plan, we definitely won't reach an agreement."



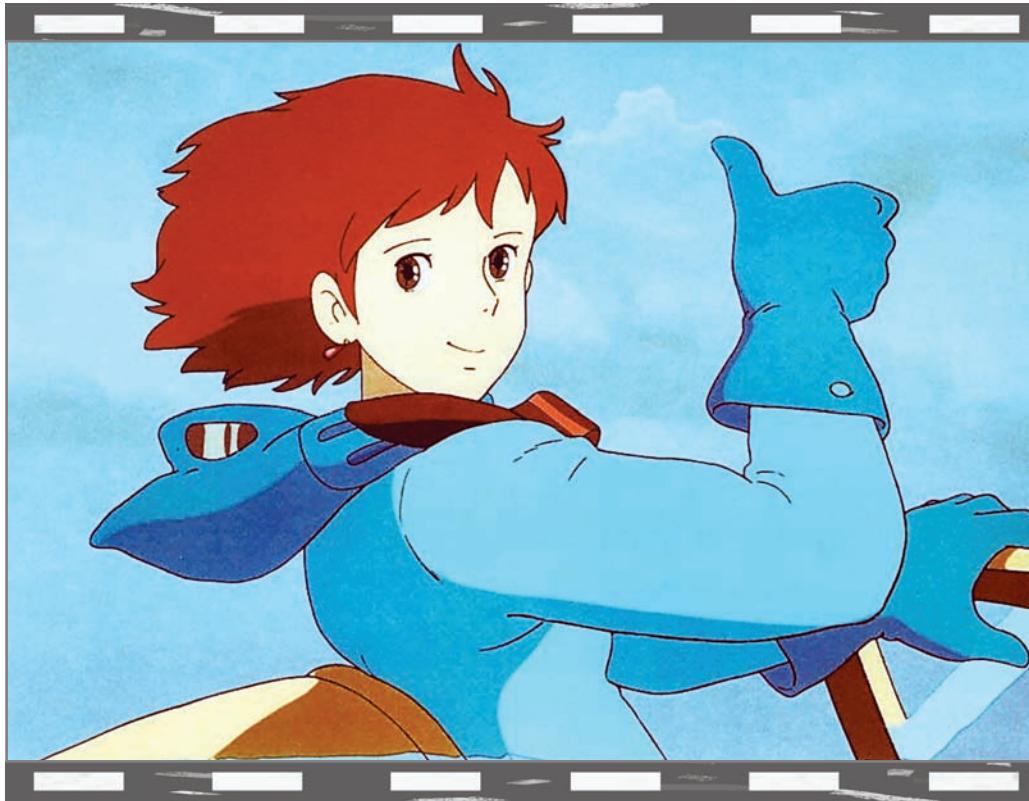
Besides writing the screenplay, creating the storyboards, and painting the scenes and the characters used by his animation team, Hayao presided over production as the director. His youngest brother, Shirou, worked for Japan's largest ad agency, Hakuhodo, and as a result the movie was produced as a joint venture between Tokuma and Hakuhodo. It was a wholly original movie in more ways than one. The greatest task was creating a screenplay from Hayao's 16-chapter existing manga story that was nowhere near the end and finishing the film under a tight nine-month production schedule and million-dollar budget. The script ended up following the manga, sometimes frame for frame, but with fundamental changes. For example, Hayao added a subplot about the invasion of Nausicaä's home and made the location into the center of the film's narrative.

In many respects the production planted the seeds of the lavish values and realism that later became hallmarks of Hayao's films for his company, Studio Ghibli. The production of the *Nausicaä* movie involved many of its future staff. That included Topcraft's president Hara Toru, who went on to serve as Ghibli's CEO, Takahata as producer, and Joe Hisaishi as composer.

Hayao worked simultaneously on the development of this feature-length adaptation and an all-watercolor single comic, *The Journey of Shuna* (*Shuna no Tabi*), published by Animage's AM JUJU imprint that June. The prince Shuna character in the comic displayed the philosophy of the *Nausicaä* stories while appearing to influence Hayao's later work on one of his best-known anime features, *Princess Mononoke*.

That July, with the *Nausicaä* movie just two months into preproduction, Hayao suffered a great personal loss: His mother died. She was 71.

Despite the many months of hardships and hard work, Hayao and his team completed production of the anime feature. On March 11, 1984, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was released to theaters in Japan. The film is set on futuristic, barren Earth, years after nuclear devastation of the infamous global war known as "The Seven Days of Fire." Armies of humans are out to destroy giant insects that have become the dominant species and are foot soldiers that protect toxic jungles of poisonous fungal plants that emit deadly gas spores fatal to humans. The toxic



Princess Nausicaä is drawn into the war between neighboring kingdoms in Hayao's 1984 anime feature *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind*, adapted from his best-selling manga. (Courtesy: New World Pictures) © Nibariki/Tokuma Shoten/Hakuhodo

jungles threaten the existence of the last human settlements. The 11th child of King Jihl, Nausicaä, a gifted young princess of a small nation, the Valley of the Wind, is drawn into the war between the neighboring kingdoms. A superb gunship pilot, the pacifist-by-nature princess attempts to stop these warring factions and make peace. Relentlessly seeking to uncover the secrets of the toxic forest, she discovers some of its secrets and plays a role in fixing it.

Remaining true to his classic manga, the film, like Hayao's later films, features an environmentalist and antiwar message that is more



subtle than most Hollywood fare. He portrays humans as people who are not completely evil but rather desperate to survive with little regard for their actions. Nature becomes a force that can bring prosperity or violent destruction, and humans are shown as neither good nor evil but as characters reacting to the horrific events around them. Lushly and realistically rendered with imaginative and strange alien landscapes, the film gave birth to Hayao's idealistic themes on a much grander scale. They would reappear most prominently in his future film, *Princess Mononoke*, in which humanity is forced to come to terms with the nature of their destructiveness.

Drawing serious international recognition and turning a profit, Japanese audiences loved the nearly two-hour version of Hayao's famous manga. The film, a unique blend of contemporary and old-fashioned Japanese culture, was a huge success domestically, earning 740 million yen in revenue with nearly a million people seeing it. At a time when movie theaters were saturated with archetypical live-action and animated fantasy films like *Conan the Barbarian*, *Krull*, and *Black Cauldron*, *Nausicaä* was, in many respects, the quintessential Miyazaki film. By using a unique mythic setting, it delivered a Tolkinesque fantasy with more heroism and *Stars Wars*-type heroics than most films.

Conversely, the edited and redubbed American version, re-titled *Warriors of the Wind*, released by New World Pictures in June 1985, for a one-week engagement in New York City, was not a major hit. (A VHS home-video edition was subsequently issued that December for the children's market.) With 30 minutes cut from his original masterpiece, Hayao and Takahata were appalled by the dramatically shortened and English-dubbed film, something Hayao called "A mockery" and Takahata dismissed as "horrible." The edited version combined badly dubbed voice work and slow-moving parts and removed much of the character's depth and subtext. Lost in the translation were much of Hayao's original narrative and meaning and some of his environmental themes, which became diluted. During a decade of Japanese-made film and television shows driven by laser-blasting, transformer robots, and super-dimensional space fortresses, the English version ultimately came across as largely out of step with what audiences expected at the time.

Most anime lovers abhor this hackneyed version. After this debacle, Hayao refused to sell any more films to the West without full theatrical distribution.

Despite this, however, *Nausicaä* was a landmark achievement that set a precedent for much of the Japanese anime that followed, introducing realistically drawn characters and grim themes. More importantly, the adventure film introduced many recurring themes that Hayao used in his later films: concerns about ecology and the environment; a childhood-inspired fascination with aircraft and flight; a pacifist and anti-military attitude; feminist and morally ambiguous characters—even villains.

Between several long hiatuses, Hayao intermittently continued drawing the manga version of *Nausicaä*. In one case he withdrew several chapters from *Animage* before it could publish them. The fastidious and fussy animator was dissatisfied with the finished product and the magazine inserted a hasty synopsis in their place. Hayao confessed that continuing the *Nausicaä* manga between film projects had become a tremendous burden before later editing it for publication in soft-cover book form.

That April, Hayao and Takahata's Nibariki (Two-Horse Power) office was created in Suginami-ku, Tokyo, with Hayao as the senior partner.

FORGING A NEW PATH: STUDIO GHIBLI

In 1985, on the strength of the success of *Nausicaä*, Hayao was able to finally carve a new path and go out on his own. That year he and Takahata cofounded and opened their own animation studio, Studio Ghibli (pronounced "jee-blee") in Kichijoji, in Musashino City. They brought along Toru Hara, Topcraft's production manager, to become the manager of their new studio. A longtime aviation buff, Hayao named the studio after the term Italian pilots during World War II gave to a hot Saharan wind and their new scouting planes, to, as he said, "blow a hot wind into the world of Japanese animation." Loathing the limits imposed by Japanese television animation and the inability to tell



longer, more complicated stories, they set out to make films with more original stories and better animation that went beyond traditional animation and those of their American counterparts.

Hayao designed and arranged the small building that served as their studio nestled in this country suburb of Tokyo. There, with Takahata



Winning accolades for storytelling and artistry, Hayao rose to become a giant in the Japanese animation industry.

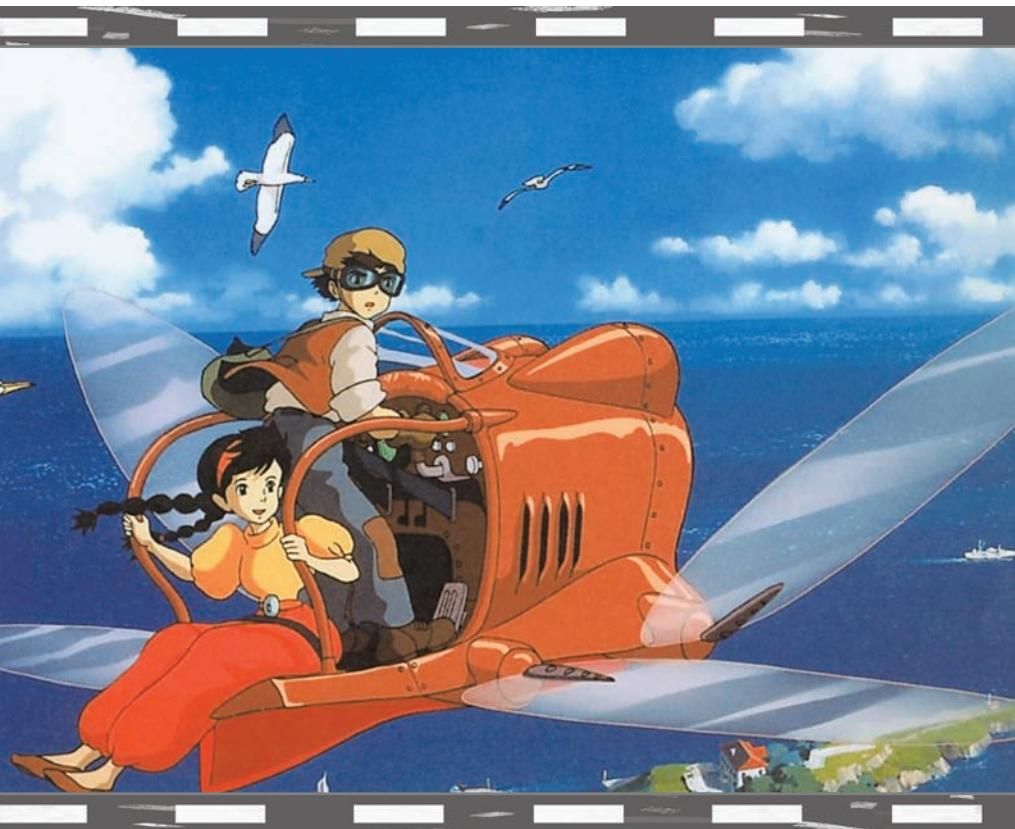
at his side, he wrote, produced, and directed many of his most famous film productions. They enjoyed huge box-office and critical success around the world, including his next three films, which gained Hayao recognition and established him as one of the world's foremost directors of films for children.

Their first project under their new studio banner was an original anime that Hayao wrote, storyboarded, and directed, *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky* (*Tenku no Shiro Laputa*). Inspired by Jonathan Swift's classic novel *Gulliver's Travels*, his version was to put a different twist on Swift's story with flying islands or "castles" set during an industrial revolution. The story showed a strong Welsh influence and was partly rooted in Celtic culture. Hayao had begun planning the film during a trip to Wales in May 1985, to study and absorb the people, its heritage, and historical landscapes in preparation for his new anime. Basing the film on events he observed during his trip, where he witnessed a miner's strike, he said in an interview, "I admired the way they battled to save their way of life, just as the coalminers in Japan did. Many people of my generation see miners as a symbol, a dying breed of fighting men . . . I wanted to reflect the strength of those communities in my film."

Opening in theaters in Japan on August 2, 1986, *La Puta: The Castle in the Sky* was his most spectacular exhibition to date. With stunning action sequences, it is a breathtaking adventure story of two orphans, Sheeta and Pazu, who travel in the late 19th century in a steam-powered rocket in search of a magical floating city of Laputa. Unlike Hayao's later films, this one combined epic action and techno-ecological themed adventure and did not earn cult status. In fact, the film eked out only around \$2.5 million at the Japanese box office.

Dubbed by critics as his "most purely enjoyable movie," this classic boy film includes faux-Victorian embellishments, a droll supporting cast of chortling air pirates, and an exhilarating flying scene. It highlights Hayao's fascination with flight and automations, including the ornithopters flown by the pirates. Previewing some of the imagery and themes of his later work, the movie in large part was a departure from his previous films that often had young, extraordinarily gifted girls testing their powers in the world. This time he made the young boy, Laputa,





Hayao's first original feature for his new company, Studio Ghibli, was his *Gulliver's Travels*-inspired 1986 fantasy/adventure complete with fantastical flying machines, *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*. (Courtesy: Streamline Pictures) © Nibariki/Tokuma Shoten

the central focus of his story. As writer David Chute opined in an article in *Film Comment*: "Hayao's characters ring truer than those of, say, the *Power Rangers*; this is partly because they are associated with the heightened sensitivities of adolescence."

A year later, in July 1987, *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky* made its U.S. theatrical premiere at the Second Los Angeles International Animation Celebration. Then, in March 1989, the dubbed version was released in America by Streamline Pictures.

One of the keys to Hayao's unprecedented success is he develops his films more unconventionally than most animators and filmmakers. Never writing a script, he instead storyboards his story as he goes along. As he once said in an interview, "I don't have the story finished and ready when we start a film. So the story develops when I start drawing storyboards. . . . It's a dangerous way to make an animated film and I would like to be different but, unfortunately, that's the way I work and everyone is kind of forced to subject themselves to it." Another key is Hayao's fascination with common themes he threads throughout his films and stories: some kind of ecological message; his fascination with flight; young, strong female characters as protagonists and antagonists; complex plots with moral undertones; the absence of a traditional villain; and the environment being a central element of the story. Such elements were inherent in *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky*, as well as other films he directed that followed. In 1987, Hayao departed from the norm: He produced, with Takahata directing, a 2-hour and 47-minute live-action documentary bridged by animated sequences released that April in Japan, *The Story of Yanagawa's Canals* (*Yanagawa Horiwari Monogatari*). The film, available with English subtitles, chronicles the story and restoration of the famous canals in Yanagawa, Japan, used to take tourists around in riverboats called *donkobune*.

GOING BEYOND TRADITIONAL LIMITS

Meanwhile, production was already under way on Hayao's next anime feature *My Neighbor Totoro*. In the early 1980s, he first originated the story and pitched it to Telecom, which rejected it. Of its origins, he told *America* magazine, "*Totoro* is where my consciousness begins." He later revealed the main character of *Totoro* was, as writer Helen McCarthy described, "a figment of his imagination, inspired by his childish imaginings of fearsome creatures living in the forest."

The road to getting the film greenlighted was a long and difficult one. In 1987, when producer Toshio Suzuki first showed Hayao's sketches of the furry giant to finance and distribution executives, they passed as they did not think it was appealing enough to take off with



audiences. Suzuki is responsible for coming up with an original idea of how to pitch the film and get it made: He proposed to the Japanese publisher, Shinchosa, producing it as part of double bill that included a film based on their dark survivalist novel, *Grave of the Fireflies*. Interested in breaking into the movie business, they accepted. They saw this as an ideal opportunity to realize their goal. Hayao's colleague Isao Takahata would direct the book-to-film feature.

Art director Kazuo Oga was attracted to working on the film after Hayao showed him an original drawing of Totoro in a *satoyama* (an area between mountain foothills and flat land). A man of such high standards, Hayao challenged Oga to raise his standards in art directing the movie. The experience was responsible for jump-starting his career. The evocative backgrounds and palettes of the film resulting from Oga's conscientious approach, in consultation with Hayao's vision, produced, as Suzuki described it, a look of "nature painted with translucent colors," which ultimately played to the strengths of Hayao's fantastic yet strangely believable supernatural character existing in its spiritually alive, natural world.

From the start Hayao wanted to make a warm and beloved film that stood out, as McCarthy writes, from "the confrontational kids-against-adults stories" found in most Japanese animated works and yet resonated with audiences. Initially his early draft of the story revolved around a red-haired six-year-old girl. But as his writing progressed and his story evolved, he decided to focus the story on two sisters, ages four and 10, respectively. By June 1987, a quarter of the production was finished, with the final film taking a year to complete.

On April 16, 1988, *My Neighbor Totoro* (*Tonari no Totoro*), Hayao's truly greatest triumph to date and one of the greatest children's motion pictures ever made, arrived in theaters in Japan. It tells the incredible adventure of two young sisters, Satsuki and Mei, befriended by a plump, mythical furry creature, Totoro, who lives inside an enchanted tree and flies around and interacts with spirits of the forest.

Depicting the real forest where Hayao grew up, the movie marked his first success with American audiences. Shown in limited release in 1993, after its release on home video in July 1994, it sold nearly a



Two young sisters befriend a mythical furry creature who flies in Hayao's triumphant 1988 feature—one of the greatest children's films ever made—*My Neighbor Totoro*. (Courtesy: 20th Century Fox) © Nibariki/Tokuma Shoten

half-million copies in the United States, a high-water mark for Hayao's career.

Critic Roger Ebert of *The Chicago Sun-Times* gave the movie high marks. He called it "a children's film made for the world we should live in, rather than the one we occupy." Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* deemed it "visually handsome" and "very charming" when "dispensing enchantment." Otherwise, he wrote, "Too much of the film, however, is taken up with stiff, mechanical chitchat." Commenting on



the film, an essayist in *Authors and Artists for Young Adults* stated that “Miyazaki does not simply replicate the cutesy cartoon antics of critters as in the golden age of cartooning. Instead, he ponders timeless themes from Asian folklore and mythology, [and] delves into the psyche of his characters.”

Hayao’s latest film enterprise produced an unexpected bonanza. Putting the global spotlight on Japanese animation, his central character, Totoro, became his most popular animated character among Japanese children and one of the most recognized characters globally. As the *Financial Times* wrote, “[Totoro] is more genuinely loved than Mickey Mouse could hope to be in his wildest—not nearly so beautifully illustrated—fantasies.”

The film’s influence was also profound. It brought about a major environmentalist movement in Japan. As the environmental journal, *Ambio*, reported: “[It] has served as a powerful force to focus the positive feelings that the Japanese people have for satoyama and traditional village life.”

In the end, *My Neighbor Totoro* also became a symbol of Hayao’s company, Studio Ghibli, much the way the classic fantasy film *E.T.* had become for its director Steven Spielberg. It generated profits from licensed toys of the title character, including items that animation fans snatched up in the United States which helped pay the overhead of his and Takahata’s comfortable new studio.

Ironically, despite the movie’s tremendous effect on Japanese culture, the movie nearly marked the demise of Studio Ghibli. Double billed with Takahata’s *Grave of the Fireflies*, the pairing proved to be a terrible mismatch. *Grave of the Fireflies* was a critically acclaimed story of misery and hopelessness about two abandoned children struggling to survive the fire bombing of Tokyo and of prolonged, agonizing deaths in the aftermath during World War II. As a result, fans of Hayao’s earlier films in Japan stayed away in droves. With so much invested in both films, what saved the studio was Hayao’s canny marketing of stuffed toys based on characters in the movies that remained popular sellers into the 2000s. Characters from the movie would become part of Studio Ghibli’s logo as well as symbols of the studio’s motion pictures.

Hayao returned to his other love: writing mangas. In March 1989, his full-color comic *Miscellaneous Notes: The Age of Seaplanes* (*Zasso Note Hikotei Jidai*) was published in *Model Graphix* monthly. Becoming a precursor to his 1995 film *Porco Rosso*, the manga was published in monthly installments through the May 1990 issue.

BEWITCHING HIS WAY TO AUDIENCES' HEARTS

Following the success of *My Neighbor Totoro*, Hayao wrote, produced, directed, and storyboarded yet another masterful anime, *Kiki's Delivery Service* (*Majo no Takkyûbin*). In the spring of 1987, Group Fudosha approached the publishers of Eiko Kadona's 1985 book of the same title—and first in a series—about adapting it into a film directed by Hayao or Isao Takahata and produced by their studio. With Hayao directing *My Neighbor Totoro* and Takahata helming *Grave of the Fireflies*, neither was available to take on the project and direct at the time. At first Hayao accepted the role of producer while the slot of director remained unfilled. In the midst of working on *My Friend Totoro*, he considered many other directors to direct the film. In his opinion, however, none fit what he wanted in terms of articulating his vision of the project. With a director yet named, he kept a hand in continuing to develop *Kiki's Delivery Service* for movie screens. He disapproved of the first draft of the screenplay, finding it dry and far removed from his vision. After *My Friend Totoro* was finished and released, he devoted more time and energy to the project and started writing his own screenplay. Originally intended to be produced as an hour-long television special, the project was expanded into a feature film after Hayao completed storyboarding and scripting it.

As he had done many times before, Hayao went on a fact-finding trip. This time he took his senior staff to Sweden to take pictures and research stunningly beautiful and picturesque landscapes, urban architecture, and other elements of the film's distinctly European-style setting. Their stops included Stockholm, his primary inspiration for the movie's backdrop, and the Swedish island of Gotland. Consequently he set the movie in a seaside city populated by a variety of ethnic groups.



One of Hayao's goals was to make a film that transcended the usual stereotypes of young witches as characterized in countless television animation productions where, as he later wrote, "the witchcraft has always merely been the means to fulfill the dreams of young girls." Instead he set out to make his version less formulaic and the girl's watchful characteristics more like a rite of passage, with talents that, as he described, "are really little more than those possessed by any real-life girl." One difference is her magic does not make her happy or successful overnight. "In this movie, magic just means some kinds of talents that girls have," he added, and Kiki is "a girl who tries to be herself by flying." Her ability to fly frees her from what is happening on the ground, but such freedom comes with worries and loneliness.

Furthermore, Hayao hoped to touch on the gulf that existed between independence and reliance, two common traits he noticed among Japanese teenage girls. He wanted to go beyond the standard coming-of-age themes by focusing on how a girl that age dealt with her creativity and talent and the difficulty every girl her age faces in coming into their own through luck, hard work, or confidence.

Overall Hayao was satisfied with the finished product. As he wrote in 1989, "I feel that this film will fulfill its goal of reaching out with a feeling of solidarity to our young viewers: the young girls living in today's world who do not deny the joy of youth, nor are carried away by it, torn between freedom and dependence (because we were all young men and women once, and the young members of our staff have these very problems now). At the same time I feel that the basic potential of this film as entertainment lies in this point and that it will inspire sympathy in the viewers."

First shown on July 29, 1989, in Japanese movie houses, *Kiki's Delivery Service* is a coming-of-age story about a cheerful 13-year-old witch-in-training, Kiki, who leaves home and her biological parents (a father who is human and a mother who is a witch) with her closest companion, the loquacious black cat, Jiji, to live on her own. In keeping with tradition of young witches, she must spend a year in a new town in order to establish herself as a full witch. She ends up in a beautiful city by the sea, Koriko. To support herself, she starts a flying delivery service



Hayao's coming-of-age tale of a 13-year-old witch-in-training, *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), set box-office records in Japan and introduced his artistry more widely to American audiences. (Courtesy: Streamline Pictures) © Eiko Kadono/Nibariki/Tokuma Shoten



to take advantage of the only magic she knows—flying a broom. She confronts and overcomes numerous setbacks in her quest to become self-sufficient and independent, including feelings of shyness and self-doubt as a teenage girl in a new town. Kiki meets new people and makes new friends in the course of her adventure. They include a kind and warmhearted woman, Osono, and her quiet, reserved husband, a baker, who give her a place to stay and are a source of encouragement to her; a slightly older painter, Ursula, who advises her through similar struggles she once went through; an airplane-loving boy, Tombo, whose biggest dream is to fly; and a lovely and gracious grandmotherly Madame, to whom Kiki delivers a pie and who treats her with care and kindness.

Kiki's greatest challenge comes after she loses her ability to fly, something she later regains after going through a process of consciously making such a talent truly hers. In the end she gains the confidence she needs despite her difficulties and decides to stay and make the city her home.

Kiki's Delivery Service was a huge hit. Attracting 2.6 million filmgoers of all ages, it set box-office records in Japan and gained a tremendous cult following worldwide. That year the film was awarded the *Animage* Anime Grand Prix prize. In October 1992, the 1-hour and 42-minute feature was shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London as part of its festival of Japanese animation, where it won over British audiences as well.

Hayao's mainstream success in Japan became a jumping-off point that would take him creatively into new fantastical worlds reflecting his eccentric genius and industry that would make him even more beloved in anime circles and attract a growing legion of followers to his work.



4

Leading the Pack

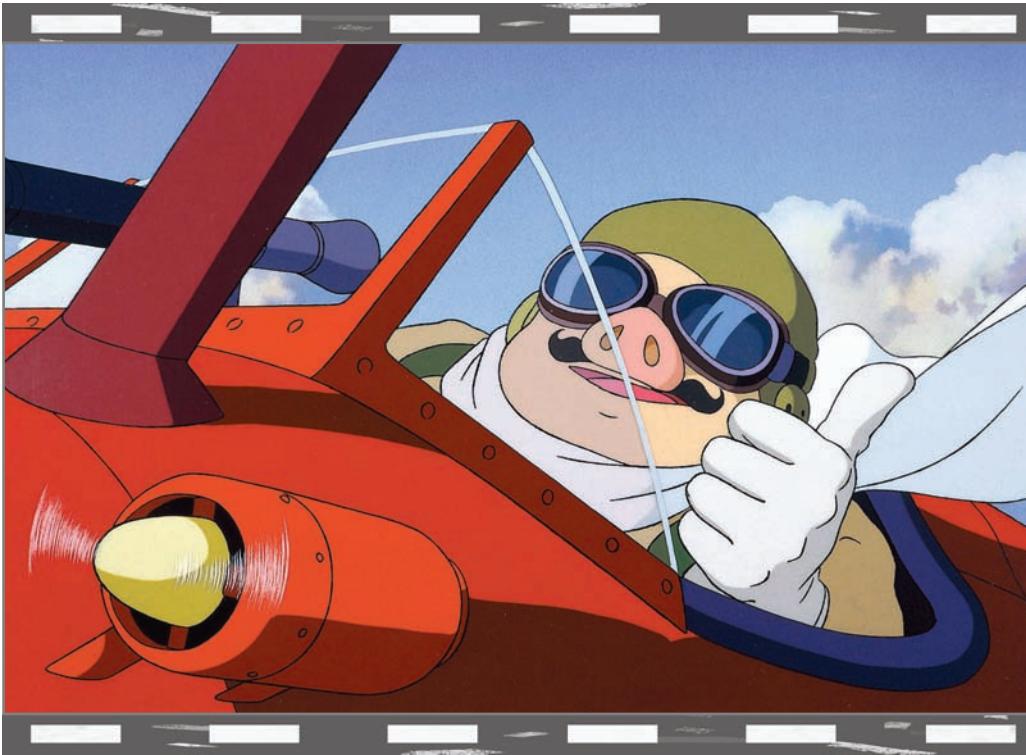
During Japan's major economic boom of the 1980s and 1990s, Hayao harshly criticized the kind of anime that his counterparts were producing, which was marked by demons and robots, amazing weaponry, and characters with super libidos. "Thirty-five animation shows a week on television, the service sector booming...this is a situation none have encountered before," he said. "Historically, it's like the ancient city of Rome—political corruption, murder for entertainment value. The Roman citizens of those days demanded not only their bread, but their circuses."

Perhaps seeking a higher moral authority and movies with morally driven and eco-friendly messages, audiences continued to flock to see Hayao's films even as times and tastes changed. In July 1991, Hayao produced one feature that would become his and Isao Takahata's most poignant, reflective, and contemplative production yet, *Only Yesterday* (*Omohide Poro Poro*). The sixth directed by Takahata, the 1-hour and 59-minute anime—based on the manga by Hotaru Okamoto and Yuko Tone—was significant in that it went outside the usual realm of animated subjects: a realistic drama written for adults, mostly women. Flipping back and forth between two time periods, it revolves around a 27-year-old Tokyo office worker, Taeko Okajima, who, in

the course of taking a vacation in the countryside with the family of her sister-in-law, flashes back to her time as a young school girl. Finding herself at an important crossroads in her life, she makes some tough decisions about her future and decides to take her life in a new direction. Impeccably animated and photographed and spellbindingly dreamlike, the movie became hugely popular. With its subject matter seemingly more in tune with the mainstream, it paved the way for future endeavors that Hayao pursued. Distinguished by his distinctive style and storytelling, they became validations of his obsessions with subjects and themes of deep concern to him even when they were considered more adult fare.

In a notable departure from his previous films, Hayao returned to the big screen with a high-sky adventure, *Porco Rosso*, also known as *Crimson Pig*. For many years Hayao had wanted to make a film about a pig, a character he loved to sketch and held in high esteem, dating back to 1988. That year he had devised a lighthearted story of a pig as a hero, which attracted interest from producers as an original release for home video but with another director at the helm. At that time Hayao had begun working on his next feature, *Castle in the Sky*. Instead of trying to direct two films at once, he let a young director be assigned to the project. But it was scrapped after the director and the writer were unable to agree on the direction of the story. In 1989, Hayao expressed in an interview with *Comic Box* magazine his continuing interest to produce "something like *Buta no Sensha [Pig's Tank]*, a silly movie which will show my embarrassing side." As he added, "The truth is I am happiest when I am writing about stupid airplanes and tanks in magazines like *Model Graphix*."

Hayao reworked his idea into a new manga, titled *Miscellaneous Notes: The Age of the Flying Boat* (*Zasso Note Hikotei Jidai*). Published in three parts by *Model Graphix* between March and May 1989, the all-watercolor featured the *Porco Rosso* character and Hayao's love for planes, particularly aircraft from the 1920s. Japan Airlines proposed making it as 45-minute in-flight movie for domestic flights. After Hayao expanded the idea and costs soared, producer Toshio Suzuki announced plans to make the project into a feature-length film instead. The airlines



A scene from Hayao's high-flying adventure about man-turned Crimson Pig, *Porco Rosso* (1992), which fulfilled his longtime desire to make a film featuring a pig character. © Nibariki/TNHC

remained a major investor and the film was still shown on flights before its theatrical release.

Basing the film loosely on his manga, Hayao made it because it combined two of his passions: old planes and Italy. As he explained in a 1999 interview, although he produced films for children, he wanted this film "to express my love for all those ships." As a result, he expanded the narrative far beyond his original manga into a bittersweet ode to the life of 1920s European pilots.

During production, after the outbreak of civil war in former Yugoslavia (the film was originally set in Croatia), Hayao changed its setting to avoid the perception that his film too closely mirrored real life and



the terrible circumstances of war. Originally he intended to make *Porco Rosso* a lighthearted film that would entertain audiences and make them laugh. He had desired to make a project featuring a pig as a hero. As he revealed in a 1993 interview, "I'm disgusted by the notion that man is the ultimate being, chosen by God. But I believe that there are things in this world that are beautiful, that are important, that are worth striving for. I made the hero a pig because that was what best suited these feelings of mine."

In response to his disillusionment with war and politics and preoccupation with middle-age and manhood, however, he changed the direction of his movie from his original concept. He used the transformation of Porco into a pig as a statement of his antifascist views (as the aviating pig intones in the movie, "I'd much rather be a pig than a fascist") and the film became one of the few he directed to feature clearly defined historical and geographical settings and where most of the story happened in the real world.

PIGGYBACKING ON HIS SUCCESS

On July 18, 1992, *Porco Rosso* opened in Japan. Considered an abstract self-portrait of the famed animator with a fictional autobiographical subtext, this 93-minute comedy adventure explores the themes of courage, devotion, honor, selfishness, and duty. Set in 1920s Italy, the film tells the story of a cunning and highly skilled Italian air force pilot, Marco Pagot, who undergoes a strange transformation. After watching the spirits of the pilots killed in the last air battle, he is cursed with the head of a pig. Under the name of Porco Rosso, the disillusioned former-flyer-turned-Crimson Pig takes a job as bounty hunter to protect ships from attack by marauding air pirates over the Adriatic Sea and bring them to justice. When he is not flying, he lives a tranquil and simple life on a tiny island where he befriends a talented and irrepressible 17-year-old aircraft mechanic and mechanical prodigy, Fio, and rekindles his relationship with childhood friend and now beautiful widow Gina, who runs a sea pilots' hotel and club. Porco's world is turned upside down, however, when he loses a duel to a new arrival, an American

pilot, Donald Curtis, who flies with the pirate gang and vies for the affections of women. He also learns the secret police are after him, as are the angry aerial pirates who want him out of the sky for good. After Fio repairs his red seaplane, Porco agrees to defend his honor in a high-stakes dogfight rematch with Curtis. The Italian air force breaks up the illegal match, however, culminating in a hilarious, action-packed finish. Thereafter Porco is returned to his human form and he and Gina live happily together.

The aerial sequences in *Porco Rosso* are gloriously animated and the story is rich in references to American movies of the 1930s and 1940s, including the screen persona of legendary actor Humphrey Bogart. In addition, British novelist and story writer Roald Dahl's stories about pilots and airplanes undoubtedly influenced the film's creator, with an image in the movie of a "cloud of dead pilots" inspired by Dahl's *They Shall Not Grow Old*. On many levels this filmic adventure is an extraordinary amalgamation of the animator's longtime fascination with flying ships and pigs (basing Porco on his personal drawings of himself as a large pig) with good storytelling. The story shifts between a serious treatment of a man-pig who loses all faith in life and himself, and humor that borders on silly comedy and blends them well together.

Hayao's vision of "a silly movie" ultimately prevailed. *Porco Rosso* became the all-time highest grossing anime film in Japan up to that time and the fourth-biggest grossing film in Japan. It was later beaten only by two *Pokémon* films and Hayao's next anime feature, *Princess Mononoke*, but it still ranks among the top 10 grossing Japanese movies of all time. That summer it also topped the success of Disney's animated tale, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and Stephen Spielberg's live-action *Peter Pan* sequel, *Hook* (1991).

That *Porco Rosso* was an even bigger success than *Kiki's Delivery Service* surprised its creator. News of its success left him deeply concerned since he meant its subject matter for a much older audience. As he confessed to a reporter, "I'm very troubled about *Porco Rosso*, because though I said I was making a film for children, I was actually making it for middle-aged people. Initially, it was supposed to be a 45-minute



film for tired businessmen to watch on long airplane flights. I have only myself to blame for turning it into a full-length movie aimed at a middle-aged audience. Why kids love it is a mystery to me."

Nonetheless his recent success allowed Hayao to continue to expand the limits of feature-length anime. Throughout the early to mid-1990s he produced a high output of animated productions, both theatrical shorts and full-length features. November 1992 marked the Japanese television debut of two spots he animated and directed for NTV (Nippon Television Network), which was celebrating its 40th anniversary: *What Is It?* (*Nandaro*) and *The Sky-Colored Seed* (*Sora Iro no Tane*).

What Is It?, whose original Japanese title translated into this popular English phrase, aired as one 15-second spot and four 5-second spots. The spots featured a green beast—a stylized version porcine with a corkscrew tail—that NTV later adopted as its official mascot.

The Sky-Colored Seed, the second series of spots Hayao created, were 90-seconds long. They were based on Reiko Nakagawa and Yuriko Omura's popular illustrated story of a boy who plants a seed given to him by a fox in exchange for a toy plane. Like something out of the children's fable *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the seed sprouts into a large house populated by a menagerie of creatures having a merry time. The fox changes his mind and tries to convince the boy to undo the deal. The boy reluctantly does. The illusion of the seed-made home then disappears and the fox ultimately loses everything.

On March 18, 1993, Hayao's father, Katsuji Hayao, died, more than 10 years after the passing of Hayao's mother.

FINDING SOLACE IN HIS WORK

While grieving his father's death, Hayao immersed himself in his work. He planned and created the story concept for Takahata's eighth film for Studio Ghibli that Takahata directed and that he executive produced for release in July 1994, *Pom Poko*. (The film is also known as *Modern-Day Raccoon War Ponpoko* or *Heisei Tanuki Gassen Ponpoko*). Following its completion, he again worked behind the scenes for his next anime

feature—writing, storyboarding, producing, and serving as a sequence director—called *Whisper of the Heart* (*Mimi o Sumaseba*).

Based on the one-volume manga of the same name by Aoi Hiiragi, it was the first Studio Ghibli feature directed by someone other than Hayao and Takahata with Yoshifumi Kondô taking the helm. Previously Kondô had worked as an animation director on the anime series *Anne of Green Gables* (part of *World Masterpiece Theater*) and at Ghibli on *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), and *Only Yesterday* (1991). It was his sole outing as a director; Kondô died of an aneurysm in 1998 at age 47.

Opening on July 15, 1995, in Japan, *Whisper of the Heart* was a charmer from start to finish. Like Hiiragi's comic book, the film focuses on the adventures of a dreamy 14-year-old girl, Shizuku, with a voracious literary appetite who secretly yearns to become a novelist. A budding schoolyard romance develops between her and a boy (Seiji), who shares her same tastes in reading, after he apologizes for ridiculing her re-working of John Denver's classic song *Country Road* into an indictment of callous urbanism, re-titled *Concrete Road*. With the encouragement of his grandfather, a kindly old wizard who owns an antique shop, she writes a novel, with the statue of a foppish cat she recalls from her first visit to his store as its centerpiece. Poignantly nostalgic and enchanting with dreamlike flights of fancy, the movie is both heartfelt and inspirational and keenly animated throughout. (Coincidentally it also introduced Baron the cat, a character that would appear in Hayao's films in 2002.)

Largely appealing to teenage girls, *Whisper of the Heart* became yet another hit for Hayao and Studio Ghibli. Grossing more than \$15 million, it ranked among the top three films in Japan the year of its release. By Miyazaki standards, as Dani Cavallaro, author of *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, writes: "Whisper stands out as a candid commentary on the jobs and the vicissitudes involved in self-testing in the attempt to ascertain one's abilities, as well as the awkward stumbling around that this inevitably involves, and on the likelihood that in the process feelings will be hurt, ambitions thwarted and potentially precious moments irretrievably lost."





A dreamy 14-year-old girl with a voracious appetite for reading yearns to become a novelist in *Whisper of the Heart*, a 1995 film Hayao wrote, storyboarded, produced, and sequence-directed. (Courtesy: Buena Vista Home Entertainment) © Aoi Hiaragi/Shueisha/Nibariki/TNHC

Accompanying the film in its release, Hayao also wrote and directed the 35-millimeter short animated music film and Studio Ghibli's only venture into music, *On Your Mark*, featuring the Japanese pop music duo Chage and Aska. The 6-minute and 40-second film was also shown at many of their concerts. Partly inspired by Russia's famed Chernobyl nuclear accident of 1986, the video chronicles the actions of two cops who discover a winged being held captive by a religious sect and set her free. An angel who spreads her wings and soars into the sky, she becomes a metaphor for liberating the countryside from the nuclear

contamination and signs of its regeneration. The video's angelic being bears a close resemblance to Hayao's princess from his earlier anime film, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Animated with less sophistication than most Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli films, the 6-minute and 40-second production evolved from a music video into a highly regarded experimental film. Writer Egan Loo described it "as simply the most exquisitely animated seven minutes ever created" as defined by its "sense of wonder so quintessential to Miyazaki's anime."

The video employed animated computer graphics and digital compositing throughout. Music critic Charles McCarter found the video's attention to detail "nothing short of incredible: from the police ship flying through the sky to the walls of the cult stronghold to the spinning wheel of the getaway vehicle. The empty Coke cans on the floor by the imprisoned being, the stuffed animals on the cop's computer desk, and the menu signs and counters in the favourite restaurant of the two policemen are the details that really bring this world to life."

In an interview with *Animage* after the video's release, Hayao said that in writing and directing the production, "I put in a lot of cryptic things, but since it's a music film, people can interpret it as they want." His own interpretation of the angelic figures was that they represented "hope" and the two cops caring for the creature and allowing her to fly paradoxically meant "to let it go where no one can touch it."

Noting Hayao's succession of hits, one critic proclaimed Hayao and his 100-employee studio as "one of the New Kings of Japanese animation." The continuing appeal of his films was due to the fact that he made movies that were simple and heartwarming and yet diverse. "I don't want to depict the world as someplace not worth living in," he stated. Animation critic Emiko Okada said at the time, "If you had a Top 10 list, they [Hayao and his studio] would fill all the slots."

At 54, with graying hair, Hayao was critical of most other Japanese animation efforts, believing they were technically poor or too commercial. He even blasted Disney movies for lacking "decency" for straying from its formerly "pure" stories. "When I look at *Beauty and the Beast*," he truthfully told an interviewer that year, "it reminds me of a psychiatric patient and his counselor."



An angel intervenes to save a country from nuclear contamination in the 1995 music film Hayao wrote and directed, *On Your Mark*. The movie was partly inspired by Russia's notorious Chernobyl nuclear accident. © Studio Ghibli

With a growing invasion of "giant robots, sex-crazed demons, and voluptuous, vulnerable co-eds," wrote Andrew Pollack of *The New York Times*, the next generation of anime, made on shoestring budgets, was hitting the marketplace. Some wondered whether Hayao's films had become too nostalgic and lacked a certain grittiness to remain commercially viable.



5

Crossing Over

Still Japan's reigning king of anime, Hayao's full-length anime movies routinely outdrew Disney films there at the box office. Hayao had never made much effort to have his films distributed outside of his native country. His work had yet to fully catch on with mainstream American audiences. Part of his reluctance was because his foreign distributors wanted to cut or otherwise alter his work. Changing circumstances played a role in reversing that trend.

After Studio Ghibli's parent company, Tokuma, hit hard times in 1995, the moment to expand had come. 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros., and Disney, the same studio's whose films Hayao had criticized, had all made overtures about distributing his films in the United States. The big box-office success in Japan of *Kiki's Delivery Service* attracted the attention of Disney, still the world's most famous producer of animated films.

At the famed Burbank, California, studio that Walt and his brother Roy built in 1940, many of Disney's own animators revered Hayao's movies, despite his harsh criticism of the studio's recent animated productions. As Pixar animator/director John Lasseter (*Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life*), whose studio's films were distributed by Disney, said, "Not a day goes by that I do not utilize the tools learned from studying his films."

He later added, "From a pure filmmaking standpoint, his staging, his cutting, his action scenes are some of the best ever put on film, whether animated or not. Watching one of his films is the best medicine when you have writer's block. When we at Pixar feel that we're beating our heads against the wall, we go in the screening room and put on a laser disc and watch one of his films and it's like, whoa, look what he did. It's inspiration to power through that brick wall."

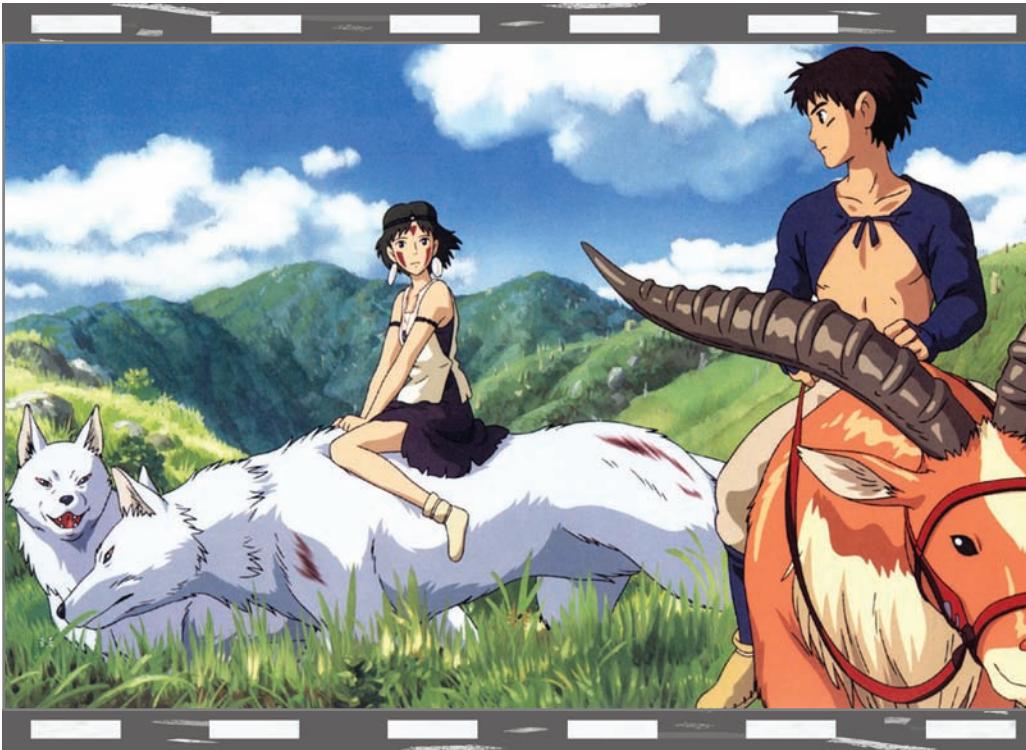
Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft, codirectors of Disney's animated feature *Mulan*, which shows strong evidence of Hayao's influence, attested, "Hayao is like a god to us."

As Eric Goldberg, who animated the Genie in Disney's *Aladdin* and codirected *Pocahontas*, commented, "Hayao is a master filmmaker, completely in control of all the elements that make an animation film great. That he does so with such visual grace, economy and passion for the joys and fears of childhood is constantly astonishing."

Hendel Butoy, who directed two sequences in Disney's animated sequel *Fantasia 2000*, later said, "I don't know of any artist more admired and respected within the animation industry than Hayao, as both a storyteller and a filmmaker. After screenings of his work, I always hear animators saying, 'Why can't we make a film like that?'"

In July 1996, Disney offered a deal to relieve Tokuma of its financial burdens in exchange for the home video rights and worldwide distribution rights—except Southeast Asia—for Studio Ghibli's eight motion pictures and Hayao's future films, including his next project *Princess Mononoke*. The films would be distributed through Disney's Buena Vista Entertainment and Miramax distribution arms. Disney also acquired rights to some live-action films from another studio owned by Tokuma. Hayao's approval was required to complete the deal; he gave it, explaining that he already had more money than he could possibly spend in one lifetime and that Tokuma had helped him out when he had needed it. The deal was formalized and underwent revisions thereafter, such as the later addition of DVD distribution rights for Disney. Under its terms, Disney made between a \$10 million to \$30 million payment at the outset.

After inking the deal, Joe Roth, chairman of Walt Disney Studios, was ebullient in his praise: "Hayao's films feature the same kind of quality



Emblematic of Hayao's success in his career was 1997's *Princess Mononoke*, about a girl raised by wolves. The film is rooted in Japanese history and folklore and attracted a larger American audience to his work. (Courtesy: Buena Vista Home Entertainment) © Nibariki/TNHG

family entertainment that Disney strives to produce." The pact was important to Disney as it gave them a foothold into Japanese animation, which was gaining a following around the world, to sell the films in Japan and abroad. Although it was unusual for Japanese studios to award such rights to distribute its own product within its own country, more importantly, the agreement meant much greater exposure for the art and artistry of Hayao's films, which were still little known beyond his home country, despite his biggest success in the United States, *My Neighbor Totoro*.

The famously publicity-shy Hayao skipped the gala reception that was held after the news conference.



Although Disney had declared that it wanted to bring Hayao's genius to the world without tampering with the movies, it did not keep its promise. For *Kiki's Delivery Service*, Disney dropped a background appearance of Hayao himself while adding dialogue not in the Japanese original. Years later Disney made modifications again to Hayao's work by slightly altering the ending of *Spirited Away*. The initial slight was not lost on Hayao. When Harvey Weinstein, president of Miramax Films, Disney's art-house film distributor, was charged with handling the United States release of *Princess Mononoke*, it was reported that Hayao sent him a samurai sword with a message attached to its blade that read: "No cuts."

Dismissing the story with a chortle, Hayao said, "Actually, my producer did that. Although I did go to New York to meet this man, this Harvey Weinstein, and I was bombarded with this aggressive attack, all these demands for cuts." Smiling, he added, "I defeated him."

In 1996, recognizing his remarkable career in animation, Hollywood's International Animated Film Society (ASIFA) honored the famed filmmaker with its Winsor McCay lifetime achievement award and Hayao traveled to Hollywood to accept the honor in person.

ENTERING STRANGE NEW REALMS

For most of his career Hayao was revered by many as an optimistic purveyor of plucky family entertainment with an idealized view of the world, sometimes with storylines that were sugary even by Disney standards. At the time, the mildly eccentric animator could captivate audiences with the watercolors of his imagination, crowd-pleasing stories, and animation that was refreshingly revealing and direct.

Emblematic of his career was his most successful film of this period—and his first Japanese period piece—*Princess Mononoke*. In the late 1970s, Hayao first made some sketches for a movie and a year later formulated a story about a girl raised by wolves rooted in Japanese history and folklore. It echoed the famous fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*, even though Hayao's story was markedly different. However, his proposed project was rejected. Nearly 15 years later, after the

success of *Whisper of the Heart* in 1995, he revisited the idea, commencing production on a full-fledged feature. The final story he wrote evolved into something far different than Disney's feature-length cartoon version or any by other animation studios; it was about a princess who marries a mononoke and ultimately becomes one herself. A mononoke is a creature in Japanese mythology—in this case a young man, Ashitaka, afflicted by a strange curse. The film was alternatively titled *Princess Mononoke* or *The Legend of Ashitaka*. Hayao openly admitted that he used folklore as a source of his ideas for the film. As he told *Kino Review* in 1998, he was drawn to the tale of “a princess with a birthmark” and “for the longest time I wanted to make her the heroine of the movie.” Over time, as he developed the idea, the birthmark became that of a burn on the arm and then finally a curse on young Ashitaka.

In doing *Princess Mononoke*, he sought to make a film that was unlike anything he had produced before and yet expressed ideas he considered as important. Thus his story progressed into one with an ecological bent about man and nature. After completing work on the film, he said in 1997, “I’ve come to the point where I just can’t make a movie without addressing the problem of humanity as part of an ecosystem.”

Hayao chose *Princess Mononoke*’s ancient mythical setting to underscore his statement about world affairs and the destructive power of greed. “There can be no happy endings between the rampaging forest gods and humanity,” he said at the time. “There is still much to live for. Wonderful encounters and beautiful things exist.”

One of the many challenges in creating the film was animating the young prince, Ashitaka, as he did not speak. Despite this fact, Hayao believed the character exuded powerful feelings and emotions without words, to which young audiences would identify. “He shrouds many things within and below his silence; he does not speak of how deeply painful that scar is,” Hayao said. “The scar is also an entirely unfair curse, like the children today who are born infected with HIV.”

In August 1994, Hayao commenced writing a detailed treatment of the film. By December, he broke from writing the story—due to writer’s block—to write and direct the music video *On Your Mark*. By April 1995, after finishing the formal story, he started storyboarding the project. In



July 1995, animation commenced and continued until its completion in June 1997, barely a month before the movie's premiere.

On a personal level, the movie was a major triumph as Hayao had already begun to lose his eyesight. Therefore, he used computer animation more extensively than in his past productions, even though his personal preference was that each cel be hand drawn. For this film, like many of his predecessors, he personally drew the complete storyboard and personally retouched 80,000 out of 1.44 million animation cels. When asked what his use of computer animation meant for the fate of traditional hand-drawn animation, he said, "If it is a dying craft we can't do anything about it. Civilization moves on."

With the added cost to acquire software and hardware and to create the computer graphics, *Princess Mononoke* became Hayao's most expensive production to date. At \$19.6 million to produce, it broke records for Studio Ghibli and the entire Japanese animation industry. Combined with added distribution and marketing costs, the movie needed to make around \$30 just to break even.

Much like anime itself, Hayao's films had become known for complex story lines and characters routinely discussing life-and-death matters, and *Princess Mononoke* was no exception.

In July 1997, Hayao's epic ecological and political adventure arrived in theaters in Japan, opposite Steven Spielberg's *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*. Set during the Muromachi period (1392–1573), the film's hero, a young prince, forced into exile, sets out to undo a curse placed upon his dying village. In his journey he bonds with a wild-child raised by wolves who lives with the animal spirits, Princess Mononoke. She has put herself on the side of the animals in a battle between man and nature, and industry trying to exploit the forest and the destructive power of greed. From the pantheon of gods and creatures that inhabit it to its sweeping, ambitious comic-book storytelling and exotic locales, the film is majestically rendered with stirring visuals and a depth of color, clean, fluid style, and hand-drawn detail that breathe life into its ancient mythical world and elaborate morals. This is not to say the movie is not without pulsating action. Right at the start a hideous, demonic boar god with writhing tentacles attacks the tiny remote

village, which spurs the film's young hero, Ashitaka, to kill it and to save the forests. He is left horribly scarred and wounded by an iron bullet, and the dignified, taciturn Princess Mononoke sets out to find the source of the bullet and heal his wound before it kills him. Exhibiting a sense of the natural beauty of its forest surroundings, the film seamlessly blends hand-drawn animation and computer-generated motion that underscore its majesty and mythical overtones that make it a special treat to watch. The Forest Spirit is a shape-shifting creature, who by day appears in animal form and at night uses its divine magical powers to bring plants and flowers to life.

Japanese audiences embraced Hayao's costly feature and its evocative folklore elements. Deploying a handcrafted look that is distinctly Japanese, it became a monstrous hit in Japan. By November, during its first five months of release, more than 12 million moviegoers—or one-tenth of the total population of Japan—paid to see the film. Ticket sales during that time totaled more \$160 million, surpassing the previous record holder for 15 years as Japan's highest-grossing film, Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* Hayao's latest in a string of critical and popular successes, the film went on to win Japan's Academy Award for "Best Film."

Even Hayao admitted after the onslaught of praise and success of his latest enterprise, "I'm more bewildered by its success than anyone else."

Of the enthusiastic reaction by audiences in his homeland, Hayao said, "I think that if you are very genuine in doing films for young children, you must aim for their heads, not deciding for them what will be too much for them to handle. What we found was that the children actually understood the movie and what we were trying to say more than the adults."

Although problems posed by rampant development, consumerism, and ecological issues have figured prominently in his previous films, Hayao added, "I've never wanted to make 'message' movies, but you can't make a movie without some kind of theme, that's a given."

Hayao was heavily criticized by the Japanese media, however, for undertaking something no animated film could accomplish: the telling of a grand epic on a large scale.



As David Chute wrote in his article, "Organic Machine: The World of Hayao Miyazaki," for the November–December 1998 edition of *Film Comment*, "The intensity of *Princess Mononoke* may have been a bit of a shock even for the Japanese."

BRIDGING CULTURES AND EXPANDING HIS AUDIENCE

Princess Mononoke was one of eight films under Disney's distribution deal to be released in dubbed versions in the United States and abroad. Distributed by Miramax, the English version was to open first in late October in New York, and in three other cities before widening its release across the country on November 5. At first Hayao resisted the idea of allowing another writer to pen an English script for a dubbed version of the film. He was convinced that the film's strong Japanese elements would not translate well with American audiences. "All I have is a vague sense of the lives and dreams that American children have," he said, adding that he feared younger members, much used to lighter animated fare, would be unable to embrace its message on a deeper level.

Famed novelist and author of comic books popular with adults, Neil Gaiman was chosen by Disney to script *Princess Mononoke* for English-speaking audiences. His main goal in writing the dialogue was, as he stated, so that it did not "sound like Saturday morning cartoons" and provided American audiences the same richly textured experience that Japanese audiences had enjoyed.

Gaiman, who never met or talked to Hayao during the process, was "horrified" at taking on the intimidating project at first, as he said, "Because he is Hayao."

In September 1999, Gaiman finally met the animator for the first time in New York and nervously went up to him and asked for his autograph. "He gave me a big hug," Gaiman said, "and told me how pleased he was."

On October 29, Disney's Miramax Films released the American version of *Princess Mononoke* to theaters in select cities and the day after



Hayao, always impeccably dressed, appears for an event in his honor.



Thanksgiving in Canada. A commercial blockbuster in Japan, Miramax was hopeful the film would expand the audience for sophisticated Japanese animation and lure others into seeing a sample of his work. Instead *Princess Mononoke* drew a mixed reaction and scant interest from moviegoers, making a meager \$2.3 million in domestic ticket sales.

Unlike his earlier film, *The Castle of Cagliostro*, which was criticized for its choppy, martial-arts-flavored dialogue, the English version of this film is effectively dubbed. To surmount the considerable cultural gap with American audiences, it features voices of Gillian Anderson (Moro the Wolf), Billy Crudup (Ashitaka), Claire Danes (San/Princess Mononoke), John De Mita (Kohroku), John Di Maggio (Gonza), Minnie Driver (Lady Eboshi), Jada Pinkett-Smith (Toki), and Billy Bob Thornton (Jigo). The cast of voices suit the vibrant characterizations on screen without losing any of its Japanese essence. Fans of Japanese animation, however, were harsher in their criticism, hammering the vocal performances for sounding too American.

Like his manga-inspired anime *Nausicaä*, *Princess Mononoke* implicitly criticizes the adverse impact of humans on nature, portrays the military in a negative light, and continues with Hayao's feminist themes in that the bellows of the iron mill in the movie are staffed only by women. The movie is also Hayao's most violent, with samurai-period action that includes beheadings and severed limbs. Instead of garnering an R-rating, the kind normally given to films distributed by Disney's art house subsidiary Miramax, the film was rated PG-13 in the United States, and released in the fall of 1999. Yet even that rating meant that many children would not see it. Another issue at the heart of the film's lackluster box-office, as Tokyo journalist Tony McNicol noted, was the film's lack of "clear-cut moral certainty that marks most Hollywood products: There are no unambiguous heroes and villains amongst the film's young samurai, villagers, and forest spirits, and there is no Disney-esque happy ending."

As a whole, critics praised the film. Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* called it "a landmark feat of Japanese animation . . . It's very easy to understand the film's phenomenal popularity . . . this intricate, epic fable is amazing to behold. No wonder the filmmaker, Hayao Miyazaki,

is acknowledged as an inspiration among his American counterparts . . ." Kenneth Turan of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote: ". . . it marries a remarkable sense of visual fantasy, both lyric and violent, with an ecology-themed story and complex characters. It's an adult fairy tale, animation as we've not experienced it before—exactly what devotees of writer-director Hayao Miyazaki have come to expect."

Before entering his alliance with the powerful juggernaut Disney and Miramax Films, Hayao's films had drawn scant attention in the United States, where he remained largely unknown. Although *Princess Mononoke* did not produce the kind of tidal wave at the box office that Disney had hoped for, it did become the first film in Hayao's career to attract a large American audience. As a result, he garnered the wide recognition his work deserved and that helped lift the veil on his artistry in the United States.

After its release in the United States on home video in 1998, *Princess Mononoke* sold a stunning 2 million copies in the first three weeks, with 20 percent of sales by people who had never purchased a retail videocassette before. By the end of 1998, sales topped 4 million and in January 1999, the movie was shown on Japanese television on a Friday night and posted an amazing audience share of 35.1 percent. Hayao was largely unimpressed. A traditionalist by nature, he stated, "I want my films to be seen in a theater. I don't care if you watch the video 50 times; it's nothing more than background music."

During a press junket in Los Angeles, promoting *Princess Mononoke*'s American release, the plain-dressed, salt-and-pepper-haired, 58-year-old animator spoke through his personal translator on an outdoor patio at the Four Seasons Hotel: "I believe that we must betray the expectations of the audience in order to keep him," he said. "The best thing is to try to make a movie that you don't have a clue how to make."

Although never sold in Japan as a children's film, Hayao had an idealized view that *Princess Mononoke* would appeal to anyone over the age of 10 despite its downbeat tone. He said, "I wanted to be honest with the young audience, to tell them that human society is not fundamentally blessed. I do this not out of a desire to reassure children, just



to say that this is the world we all live in, children and adult, that we share this despair."

Bothered by the problem, in his opinion, of bad animation around the world, he was hopeful American audiences would embrace *Princess Mononoke* much the way Japanese audiences had. "There are too many animators making junk," he said. "And too many people who want to see junk."

Despite the rising presence of computer animation in feature films, including *Princess Mononoke*, Hayao held firm in his belief that the artist would always have a singular role to play. "No computer can write a wonderful story," he said.

One of the first trips the Japanese animation maestro made after arriving in Los Angeles was to take a tour of Walt Disney Studios. Gathering around his younger American disciples who had developed a reverence for his work, he said, "I love watching my colleagues work."

During his trip, with a half-dozen assistants fluttering around at his elegant hotel suite, a Japanese film crew trailed his every move, recording it for posterity and to document his life story for Japanese television. Reflecting on his reasons for becoming an artist, he told a reporter, "I want to capture the essence of movement. Animation is a manifestation of that desire."

The genial, unpretentious animator admitted he was baffled by the popularity of his work in America. As he said through an interpreter, "I think it must prove that for all our superficial differences, we humans have a great deal in common."

Always viewing himself as an artist rather than a businessman, he understood the logic of getting his films before more eyes. "I believe in the power of the artist," he told the *Christian Science Monitor*. "You have to rely on your core values and make the best films you can."

Hayao's distinct visual style and vision continued to make him the envy of American animators and exerted a powerful influence over their work. As Glen Keane, who animated Disney's *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *Tarzan*, reflected, "The biggest impact Hayao's work had on me was seeing how he had the courage to let simple things entertain us. A situation doesn't always require a big explosion or a crazy gag. It can be

something as simple as the way the wind moves flowers or the sound of a bee buzzing around a girl as she watches the clouds drift overhead. It encouraged me to find atmospheric moments in our films to animate, beginning with the eagle sequence in *Rescuers Down Under*."

Longtime Disney story artist Joe Grant, who first made his mark on the studio's first full-length feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and his most recent feature *Tarzan*, said, "I enjoy dreaming along with him. He's the original dream merchant . . . It's not a regular cartoon, but a work of art that moves; its pacing is beautiful and symphonic in its rhymes."

Of such praise from his American counterparts, Hayao was typically humbled that his work had that kind of widespread influence. He said, "My own work has been influenced by so many different factors and films. All artists take their place in the continuing cycle of influencing and being influenced. In some ways, the history of art represents a great relay race, with each runner transforming the baton as he carries it. At some point, I'll be ready to hand the baton on to the next generation—if they wish to receive it."

After completing *Princess Mononoke*, rumors swirled that it might be Hayao's last film due to his deteriorating eyesight. As the animation legend lamented at the time, "My eyes keep getting worse. On my next film, I have no choice but to be much less involved with the drawing than I have been. It's a question of whether or not the staff will accept my somewhat altered role as a director. I can see fine, but when I'm doing animation, I have to really see."

Many devoted fans cringed at the thought of the creative vacuum his absence would create.



6

Finding a Renewed Sense of Spirit

On January 14, 1998, Hayao officially announced, as many feared, that he was leaving Studio Ghibli, the studio he had cofounded 13 years earlier with his longtime partner and colleague, Isao Takahata. The announcement came as no surprise. He had indicated after production of *Princess Mononoke* that his eyesight was failing. As a result, he believed he could no longer guarantee his movies would be the kind of high-quality art he desired.

Hayao intended to produce small films for the Studio Ghibli Museum—insisting that the museum should be full of children being noisy—and to train young animators.

In planning his departure, he built a new studio, Butaya (Pig House), near Studio Ghibli as his “retirement place.”

On January 16, 1999, one year after retiring, Hayao surprised everyone by returning as the *shocho*, or leader, of Studio Ghibli. He took on a more active role in asserting organizational discipline and focusing employees on their tasks.

Little did Hayao realize but his career was not yet over. He had one more film he decided to make, *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*). Later dubbed by critics as “Chihiro in Wonderland,” it

would become his vision of—and the Japanese equivalent to—America's beloved children's classic, *Alice in Wonderland*.

The bristly bearded and bushy browed animator conceived the idea after five young girls, daughters of friends of his, had visited him at his cabin in the mountains every summer. After one of their visits, he read some girls' comics they had left behind that seemed to provide nothing but, as he said, "a certain kind of cheap romance, which is now what girls that age really dream about."

Following this epiphany, Hayao decided "a more interesting story" was having a 10-year-old girl play the leading role that was more typical of girls that age, someone that 10-year-olds could recognize in themselves. He wanted to show audiences that "people have strengths within them that can be called on in extraordinary circumstances," he said. "That is how I wish my young friends to be, and I think that's how they hope to be."

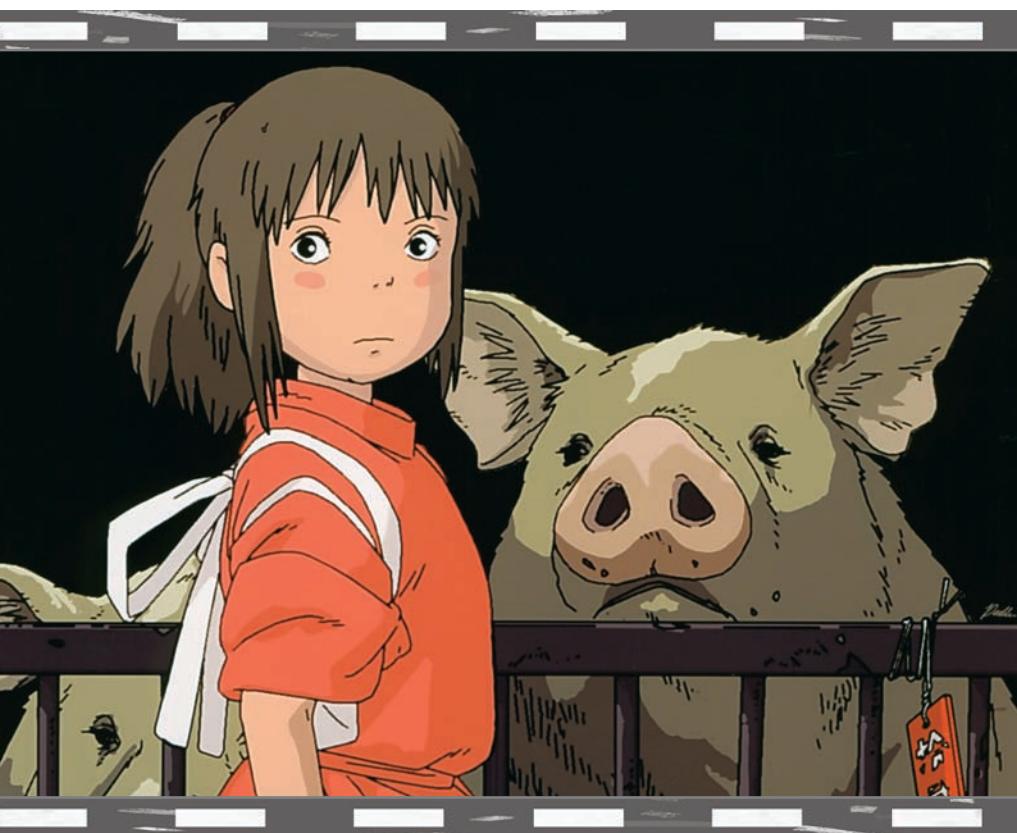
Hayao modeled the sulky, spindly legged Chihiro after two of the five girls who visited him. In the course of making the film, in keeping true to their spirits, he would ask himself, "Would one of those girls do this? Is it too much for them?"

Hayao chose to make the stepsisters more attractive than how they were portrayed in the book and Disney film version of *Cinderella*. "I felt bad for the evil stepsisters. Couldn't they be a little bit prettier?" he told *USA Today* in September 2002. "It would have appeared much more tragic if her sisters had been more charming and the prince had to choose among them."

Like his 1997 feature, *Princess Mononoke*, Hayao burrowed deep into the religiosity and age-old beliefs of his native country. As he stated, "Because of the influence of China, Confucianism and Buddhism came to Japan, but the truth is that deep in the heart of the Japanese there is a very primitive animism that remains the strongest belief."

Hayao took some creative liberties in creating the Japanese gods in the film by giving them human shape. "But," as he said to a reporter at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2002, to promote the film's North American release, "I asked them to take a break in this movie and didn't give them an opportunity to grace the screen."





Spirited Away, Hayao's masterfully told tale of an unhappy 10-year-old forced to survive in a strange land, was in the mold of *Alice in Wonderland*. The film won an Academy Award, Hayao's first, for "Best Animated Feature." (Courtesy: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences) © Disney Enterprises

Instead, he added, "I chose to give shape to those gods that tend to remain invisible, so I guess I had to make them up. I knew I was risking their wrath by giving shape to the well god, the storage-house god and the others. But I think the gods are more realistic than the traditional ones."

Released on July 27, 2001, in Japan, *Spirited Away* succeeded on all levels. The movie is the story of a spoiled 10-year-old girl (Chihiro),

unhappy as her parents drive her to their new home in suburbia, who is forced to survive in a strange land after her parents are transformed into pigs. She discovers a mysterious, deserted castle that turns into an otherworldly bathhouse full of ghosts and spirits that is owned and run by a nasty, evil, beak-nosed sorceress (Yubaba), where she becomes a servant to the Shinto gods. The apathetic girl musters the courage, confidence, and resourcefulness to cope with her singular challenge of restoring her parents to human form. She must face a surrealistic world filled with faceless ghouls, samurai frogs, bloated marshmallow Peep-like chicks, wispy sprites, and a spectacularly incontinent Stink God. Along the way she encounters a strange young boy with magical powers (Haku), who in the end cannot be trusted, but who helps her navigate through the uncertainties and capricious creatures that inhabit this treacherous new world to save her parents.

Superbly crafted, *Spirited Away* unites brilliant painted backgrounds with cogent characterization, all while making a fantasy world seem more real than the real world itself, with, as *The New York Times*, wrote, "its own temperature and density, a world of terror, and delight and a thousand small surprises." Featuring Hayao's love for children and environmentalist concerns, the movie, above all else, is about wonderful storytelling. In the end the fantasy film is about spirituality giving, as *National Catholic Reporter* critic Rich Heffern described, "a gift of hope, courage, and vitality" to audiences.

Spirited Away broke all Japanese box-office and attendance records. Five months after its release it surpassed Japan's previous all-time hit, director James Cameron's epic drama *Titanic* (1997). It also exceeded Hayao's previous box-office high as well. During its eight-month run through March 2002, it sold a record 21.4 million tickets and amassed total gross earnings of 30.4 billion yen (approximately \$300 million). For a country with a fraction of the movie screens in the United States—2,500 compared to 36,000—and where average ticket prices were \$14, it made Hayao's latest feat even that much more remarkable. It also became the first Japanese film to earn \$200 million internationally—including France and Southeast Asia, where Hayao's films are much more popular than in America—before opening in the United States.



Audiences leaving Japanese theaters enjoyed the fact that the movie was rich in Japanese culture and mythology. As one patron, 15-year-old Emio Omata, told a reporter after a screening, "*Sen to Chihiro [Spirited Away]* is so Japanese-ish. The music, the culture, the background are closer to Japanese people. My grandparents love Hayao's anime. They ask me if I have seen the latest one yet."

Fumiyo Ono, then a 39-year-old mother of four, echoed such praise. Glowing after watching the film, she said, "The images were so beautiful. They are dreamlike, yet convincing. If you see trees, you can almost feel their presence."

Dave Kehr of *The New York Times*, who saw the Japanese version, heaped high praise on its creator and the film itself. "It's a masterpiece, pure and simple—certainly the finest thing that the distinctive Japanese style of animation, called anime, has produced—and a film that can stand with the Disney classics of the '30s and '40s in the range of its imagination and the quality of its execution."

The film so authentically captured the setting of old Japan that had existed until a few decades earlier that many adults actually cried upon seeing the almost forgotten scenery of their country's heritage. But for children who had never seen or lived through such images, the movie was "a complete fantasy world for them," Hayao explained. "I think foreign audiences may feel something similar to what Japanese children felt."

Not unlike Chihiro's clueless parents, Hayao found it amusing that adults had a harder time grasping the meaning of his films. As he related in an interview, "The other day, I met the governor of Tokyo. He said, 'That *Princess Mononoke*. That was complicated. What was going on?' But elementary kids get it in a flash."

Lost in all the attention was another project Hayao had conceived and executive produced for Studio Ghibli: *The Cat Returns* (*Neko no Ongashii*). An indirect sequel to his 1995 fantasy film *Whisper of the Heart*, the 75-minute feature depicts the story from the novel written by the girl in the theatrical feature and features three characters from the film. First known as the "Cat Project," the film came about in 1999, after a Japanese theme park requested that Studio Ghibli produce a

20-minute short starring cats. Hayao agreed to its production so long as it featured three key elements from the feature in the new film: the popular Baron the cat, Muta (Moon), and the mysterious antique shop. Writer Aoi Hiiragi was commissioned to create the manga version of the short called *Baron: The Cat Returns* (*Baron: Neko no Danshaku*), which was published in English by Viz Media. After the theme park cancelled the film project, Hayao took over the existing production, which grew to 45-minutes in length, after he used it as testing ground for upcoming studio directors. Shortly after that he and Toshio Suzuki went ahead with turning the project into a feature-length film from 525 pages of storyboards produced over a nine-month period from Hiiragi's story. With Hiroyuki Morita serving as director, it became only the third Studio Ghibli feature to be directed by someone other than Hayao or Takahata. On July 19, 2002, *The Cat Returns* opened in Japan to widespread praise. The story of a teenage girl (Haru) and her ability to talk to cats was released in the United States in 2003.

STILL SPIRITING AWAY HIS AUDIENCES

In the winter of 2002, Walt Disney's Buena Vista Pictures released *Spirited Away* in France and Asia, where it was lauded, before opening in theaters that fall in the United States. The fact none of Hayao's films had yet to make a strong showing in the United States left some Hollywood executives dubious about its debut, except for former Disney studio chief and DreamWorks cofounder Jeffrey Katzenberg. After a recent visit to Tokyo to introduce a Japanese-dubbed version of his company's blockbuster movie, *Shrek*, Katzenberg said of Hayao and his work, "What I like about it is so much a part of mainstream moviegoing here [Japan]."

For Hayao, then 60, *Spirited Away* marked the culmination of an artistic career that had included 12 full-length animated movies, four television series, comic books, and countless critical kudos and awards. Dragged to a news conference after the movie had de-crowned *Titanic* in his country, he said, "I think a small number of the people will understand the film, and that is more than enough."



While delighting in playing in the antiglobalization curmudgeon, the Japanese animation virtuoso talked vaguely to reporters about the film opening one day in America, perhaps stung by the fact that his only film to open commercially there, *Princess Mononoke*, had bombed at the box office.

Although revered like a hero in his own country on par with American animators like Walt Disney, Hayao's name was still largely unfamiliar to American audiences. Despite American consumers spending more than a half billion dollars on anime videos and DVDs annually, Japanese animated features had yet to attract large audiences domestically. Opening in theaters previously that year, the film, *Metropolis*, based on Osamu Tezuka's manga of the same name, reaped a mere \$253,000 in limited release in the United States. Following its domestic theatrical release in 1999, Hayao's *Princess Mononoke*, though a major hit in Japan, eked out only \$2.4 million at the box office.

Nonetheless Disney executives were convinced that the Japanese maestro's latest film would become the major breakthrough they had waited for. In 2001, *Spirited Away* took "Best Pictures" honors at Japan's Academy Awards and, in 2002, became the first animated feature in the 50-year history of the Berlin Film Festival to win its top prize, the Golden Bear Award (it tied with the movie *Bloody Sunday*). Pixar's John Lasseter, who served as executive producer on the English version, equated *Spirited Away's* heart, humor, and character development to classic Disney films, saying, "It sucks you in at the beginning, and you forget everything until it's over." Hayao "doesn't just make movies. He makes movies for a reason."

Disney's version featured a cast of recognizable American names from film and television. It starred Daveigh Chase (Lilo in Disney's *Lilo & Stitch*) as Chihiro; Lauren Holly and Michael Chiklis as Chihiro's parents; Suzanne Pleshette (of TV's *The Bob Newhart Show* fame) as the grating-voiced sorceress, Yubaba; Jason Marsden as Chihiro's young friend with a Prince Valiant haircut, Haku; David Ogden Stiers (best remembered as the character Major Charles Emerson Winchester III on the Emmy award-winning series *M*A*S*H*) as the six-armed, bearded, and bodiless boiler man, Kamaji; and Susan Egan as the bathhouse attendant, Lin.

Disney assigned Kirk Wise of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Atlantis: The Lost Emperor* fame to direct the English-language version. Unlike American-animated features where the voices are recorded first and then animators created the images to accompany them, he directed an American voice cast to provide voices and dialogue to fit those images already done. Aside from the usual problems that result in creating an English version, one significant challenge was scripting the film for American audiences while preserving the original meaning of Hayao's characterizations and synchronizing the new dialogue to existing animation. As Wise told writer Charles Solomon of *The Los Angeles Times*, "We had the writers in the booth with us, so that if an actor had a difficult time fitting a line to the character's mouth movements, we would do a rewrite on the fly to shave off a syllable or substitute a shorter word for a long one."

By contrast, the Disney team also had to add at times lines of dialogue explaining Japanese cultural references so their importance was not lost in the translation for American audiences, especially when the imagery was something Japanese audiences would clearly identify with but American moviegoers would not.

COMFORTING COUNTERPARTS

During postproduction of the English dub of *Spirited Away*, Hayao, who turned 61 that January, complimented the work of his American animation counterparts. "To my way of thinking, *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* left home and went to America to become *Spirited Away*," he said. "It's almost as if I'd seen my daughter go away to school in America. I'm sure John Lasseter has done a good job, but I wouldn't be surprised if she comes back a little bit Americanized and speaking with a slight foreign accent."

Lasseter had lobbied hard for the aging auteur to come to America to work with him and the Disney team on the translated version. But having known the famed roly-poly toon titan for 20 years from the time when Woody and Buzz Lightyear of *Toy Story* were mere pixels, Hayao said, "No, you take care of it." Describing their relationship, Hayao



said, "He functioned as an enormously effective bulldozer in the face of obstacles . . . I trust him implicitly." While not denying the fact they are soul mates, Hayao added with a laugh, "He's fatter than me."

As a tribute to his dear friend, Hayao included a hopping lamp that welcomes visitors in *Spirited Away*. It was a nod to Lasseter's famous creation, Luxo Jr., the star of his first computer-animated and Academy Award-nominated short of the same name and the featured mascot that opens each Pixar release.

Hayao was typically low-key, however, about the importance of the rest of the globe seeing his films and had not wavered one iota in his belief. "I guess I should feel that way, right?" he told a reporter. "My heart is so full when I make a film. I want to reach out and touch Japanese children in my immediate vicinity. That it's making its way out of our island nation and around the world is a bonus."

On September 20, 2002, backed by a major advertising campaign, *Spirited Away* opened in 10 cities nationwide, including Hollywood, where it played in the El Capitan Theatre. Disney's distributor, Miramax, followed the same strategy they did in releasing *Princess Mononoke* by limiting Hayao's latest film to showings largely in art-house cinemas rather than in mainstream theaters. Disney's new title was indeed appropriate. It became a metaphor of how critics and audiences responded to Hayao's marvelous epic "Through the Looking Glass" anime fantasy. The film never lost its heart and dreaminess and his fussy, unmistakable obsession for details in its translated form.

After years of making films for children and three years after the failure of *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away* became Hayao's first imported and dubbed film to be embraced by a wider audience in the United States. The imaginatively told fantasy, with its timely glimpses into contemporary Japanese culture and revealing references on identity, individuality, and the value of hard work, reaped a mere \$5.55 million in limited release through February 2003. Taking in about three times as much as *Princess Mononoke*, it went on to rack up slightly more than \$10 million in ticket sales in the United States by September of that year and an astonishing box-office gross of more than \$274.9 million worldwide.

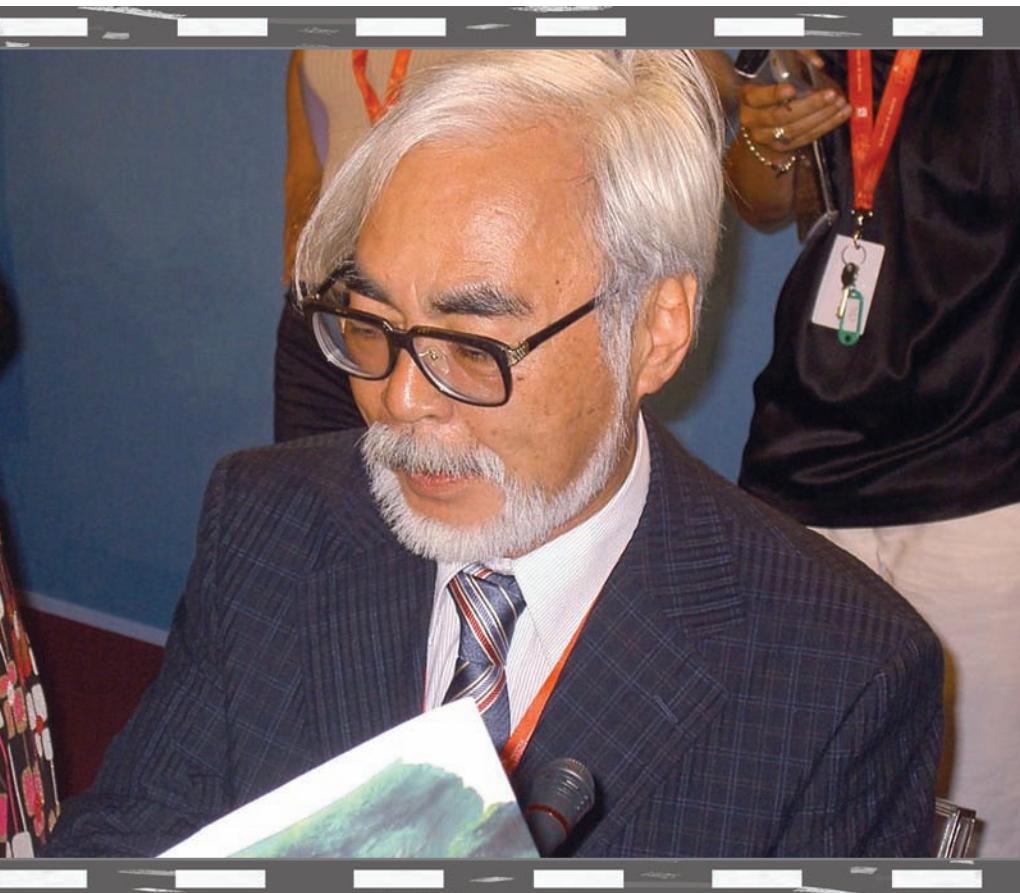
Overall critics lauded *Spirited Away* as the greatest animation picture ever made and one of the best motion pictures of any kind. As a whole, it was met by almost universal acclaim. Critic Kenneth Turan of *The Los Angeles Times* called it "a heroic adventure story worthy of 'The Arabian Nights' . . . a fairy-tale quality reminiscent of the unexpurgated works of the Brothers Grimm . . ." Stirring talk of its Oscar worthiness, Elvis Mitchell of *The New York Times* added, "The world deserves a glimpse at the slacker-sprite behind so much magic."

Some critics were harsh in their assessment. Desson Howe of *The Washington Post* stated, "As with many Japanese animated films, the plot kind of drags on and on. After a while, you may feel like standing up and saying, 'Excuse me. No more new weird characters, please.' But this is a cultural wildcard experience: wacky, different, unusual, even nutty. Don't say I didn't encourage and warn you." David Sterritt, a critic for *The Christian Science Monitor*, was more mixed in his views, concerned about the cartoonish violence and vulgarity, especially for younger audiences, but complimentary about its maker. As he wrote: "*Spirited Away* is too intense for the youngest viewers, but teenagers will enjoy it—an ill-smelling "stink-god" character is almost worthy of a Kevin Smith gross-out movie—and grown-ups should find it diverting, if not exactly deep. Hayao brings a thematic ambition to feature animation that some of Hollywood's cartoonists would do well to learn from."

Similarly, many critics praised the English-language version for its vocal performances complementing the piercing tranquility and purity, the wonder and enchantment, and inventiveness and impressive visuals of Hayao's two-hour-plus masterpiece.

As a result, *Spirited Away* won many critics awards and made many "Top 10" lists. The movie was named best animated feature of 2002 by the New York Film Critics Circle, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, the Online Film Critics Society, and the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures. Both the animation and motion picture industries also showered Hayao with more honors for his masterful film. On February 1, 2003, *Spirited Away* triumphed at the 30th annual Annie Awards, the animation industry's answer to the Oscars, with a record 750 people attending that year's ceremony at the neon-trimmed, his-





Hayao signs his autograph at the 65th Venice International Film Festival in July 2008.

toric Alex Theatre in Glendale, California. Hayao's magical tale won four Annies, including awards for best feature, direction, writing, and music.

In pre-Oscar buzz, *Spirited Away* was considered the frontrunner to walk away with an award in the "Best Animated Feature" category. Some industry insiders predicted Disney's limited release would actually benefit Hayao's film and that winning an Oscar would give it a huge boost at the box office.

On March 23, Hayao made history when members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences bestowed him with his first Oscar for “Best Animated Feature” at the 75th Academy Awards at the spectacular Kodak Theatre in Hollywood. Topping a formidable field of best feature nominees, including Disney’s *Lilo & Stitch*, DreamWorks’s *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, Disney’s *Treasure Planet*, and 20th Century Fox/Blue Sky’s *Ice Age*, *Spirited Away* became the first anime film to win an Oscar and only the second animated feature ever honored in that category. DreamWorks’s *Shrek* was the first to win when the category was introduced in 2001. Immediately after the victory Disney widened the film’s release to 2,000 theaters across the country, raising its stature as Hayao’s most mainstream movie yet.





Retreating to His Mystical World

Due to the resulting widespread attention and international clamor over his work, Hayao grew more reluctant to step out into the spotlight. He was a far cry from his early yen-pinching days when he was building his career, had yet to become a household name, and was more accustomed to seeing, as Tony McNicol of *Japan Inc.* wrote, his "creations on junk food cartons than in the annals of movie history." Most days the reserved 62-year-old animator lived in quiet seclusion from the harsh glare of the media, even in his native homeland, where he could rarely go out in public without being recognized.

Throughout the maelstrom of activity surrounding him, Hayao managed to maintain his unique perspective and humanistic world view that had made him an authentic genius with the ability to extract the maximum impact from his work. Using computer animation to help maintain artistic control of his creations, he was inspired to do more films. By December 2003, advanced trailers showed up in movie theaters for his forthcoming film, *Howl's Moving Castle*, due out in summer 2004.

It took Hayao five years to make that film into a reality. He first became interested in adapting author Diana Wynne Jones's juvenile fantasy novel *Lord Howl's Castle* after reading it in 1999. His studio



An original theatrical poster for the American release of Hayao's widely acclaimed fantasy feature *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004). © Disney Enterprises



subsequently purchased the rights but with plans for Hayao to write the script and Mamoru Hosoda to direct it. In the summer of 2002, however, Hosoda suddenly quit. At the time, Hayao came out of retirement to take over helming the project. Jointly produced by Studio Ghibli and Toho Co. with the participation of Nippon Television Networks, the movie was originally planned as Toho's main summer release, but it was pushed back to autumn due to production delays resulting from Hosoda's departure.

Although he had used computer-generated imagery in his movies, starting with 1997's *Princess Mononoke*, Hayao instituted a new rule beginning with this film that CGI could account for no more than 10 percent of the images in any of his pictures. Thus the animation was largely hand drawn and handmade. In incorporating computer animation with the old tried-and-true form, he told *The New York Times*, "I've told the people on my CGI staff not to be accurate, not to be true. We're making a mystery here, so make it mysterious."

After writing and directing seven features since *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Hayao stuck with his proven, successful style and formula in making *Howl's Moving Castle*. It was a mystical and elegant approach that was as much about time-honored traditions, magical transformations, favorite motifs, and colorful landscapes as it was about his profound passions, pessimistic views, and immorality in the world around him that had become his trademark.

When asked if he thought his films, known for their precedent-setting analogues in folklore and fantasy and striking landscapes, fit into the expanding universe of children's entertainment, the white-haired 64-year-old animator and director said with a weary smile, "The truth is I have watched almost none of it. The only images I watch regularly come from the weather report."

His first movie since 2002's *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle* received its first international exposure opening at that year's Venice International Film Festival, where it won the Golden Osella award for animation technology. On November 20, 2004, *Howl's Moving Castle* opened to general audiences, once again fitting Hayao's own world view. The film exhibits his spot-on instincts and famous ability to make

characters that are both rich and complex against a backdrop of the horrific evils of war and the destructiveness of man and powerful themes of love and kindness. *Howl's* tells the story of Sophie Hatter, an unassuming, modest 18-year-old girl and working-class hat maker, in a city preparing for war. Rarely thinking of adventure or romance, she crosses paths with the Witch of the Waste after she walks into her hat boutique. She transforms the intrepid young girl into an elderly crone. In her search to reverse the curse cast upon her, Sophie is swept off her feet by the wizard Howl. He is a lovable cad who steals the hearts of beautiful young women and occupies a fantastic and enormous Jules Verne-type traveling castle with a young apprentice and the fire demon, Calcifer.

Staying remarkably true to Jones's book, *Howl's* departs from its original story in a number of ways. Hayao turns the traditional villain, the Witch of the Waste, into a sympathetic character eventually accepted with open arms by the girl she cursed. He adds an entirely new subplot of a brutal war between two kingdoms that makes the rascally sorcerer Howl an antiwar martyr after destroying warships. Otherwise the film takes some surprising and amusing twists and turns as the Witch of the Waste becomes less powerful and has no earthly idea on how to undo the spell she cast on Sophie.

MAKING BOX-OFFICE HISTORY

Howl's Moving Castle enjoyed record-breaking success in Japan after its release.

Anticipation built for days before it opened. Many of the some 1.1 million moviegoers, who saw the film during its first two days of release on 450 screens nationwide, lined up outside movie theaters overnight to see the film by the man some have affectionately called "the Wizard of Awe." From the 1.48 million yen they paid in ticket sales, the movie tallied \$14 million over those days, a 40 percent higher opening than *Spirited Away*, and more than \$90 million in its first four weeks of release before opening in Korea on Christmas Eve. By February 2005, it had amassed \$210 million in international box-office ranking as Japan's third-highest-grossing film of all time.



One reason for the record box-office sales was that adults and kids both loved Hayao's richly detailed traditional 2-D animation over more trendy 3-D projects. Also adding to the movie's broad appeal was that it featured well-known voice talent to Asian audiences, including Chicko Baisho, one of Japan's leading stars during the 1970s and 1980s, and Takuya Kimura, a member of the popular pop group, SMAP, and who made his acting debut earlier that year in Wong Kar Wai's live-action film *2046*.

That December, as *Howl's Moving Castle* continued breaking box-office records in Japan, a special exhibition, *Hayao et Moebius: Deux Artistes Dont Les Dessins Prennent Vie* (*Two Artists's Drawings Taking on a Life of Their Own*), opened featuring the work of Hayao and famous French writer and illustrator Jean Giraud (Moebius). Hayao has called him an influence and they became friends because of their mutual admiration for each other. (Moebius, in fact, named his daughter, Nausicaä, after Hayao's fictional heroine.) Both attended the grand opening of the event, which ran through April 2005.

Under the supervision of Pixar's John Lasseter and Pete Docter, Disney, meanwhile, readied the English version of *Howl's Moving Castle* for release the following year in United States, France, and Southeast Asia. Overseeing the script adaptation were Cindy and Donald Hewitt, who scripted the English translated edition of the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away*. Actors Christian Bale and Emily Mortimer were cast as the voices of the mysterious Howl and young Sophie, respectively. Screen legends Lauren Bacall and Jean Simmons (of *Spartacus* and *Great Expectations*) signed on as the voices of the Witch of the Waste and Old Sophie, the girl transformed by the witch's curse. To bring a bit of humor to the character, comedian Billy Crystal was enlisted to portray the chatty fire demon, Calcifer. (During the dubbing of the film, he improvised several takes that appear in the finished film.)

On June 10, 2005, Disney released its version to theaters in the United States. Exclusively at Hollywood's El Capitan Theatre, the film was shown in both Japanese and English-dubbed versions. Domestically, however, it fizzled and did worse financially than *Spirited Away*, taking in just \$4.7 million, roughly 60 percent less than the latter. Internationally

the anime feature did far better, topping \$222 million in revenue and earned an Oscar nomination for “Best Animated Feature.”

Hayao’s fanciful, inventive works, though highly regarded, had yet to create the kind of huge box-office return Disney had hoped for in this country. Part of this was because, like *Spirited Away*, *Howl’s Moving Castle* was relegated to the art-house circuit, making it more challenging to bring people to see his movies and generate a huge return compared to other family-oriented films playing in wider release in thousands of theaters. In addition, though he was revered and his films were block-busters in Japan, by and large, he was still little-known by mainstream audiences in America.

Most critics were enchanted by Hayao’s so-called “wizard of odd” treatment. Kenneth Turan of *The Los Angeles Times* called his latest epic journey “just as magical” as his previous hand-drawn work and “likely to make viewers feel they’ve never seen anything quite like it before.” *The Christian Science Monitor* film critic David Sterritt wrote: “*Howl’s Moving Castle* is a smart, entertaining fairy tale for all ages that outdoes not only the miscalculated *Madagascar* but even popular Japanese movies like *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*, the ‘anime’ pictures that put Hayao Miyazaki on the global filmmaking map . . . Most of all, though, it benefits from Miyazaki’s abundant visual imagination, which fills the screen with eye-dazzling wonders. You run across animation this ingenious about as often as a moving castle comes your way.”

Certain flaws contributed to the film’s domestic downfall, among them a hard-to-follow plot and its decidedly downbeat tone. As entertainment writer Bruce Wallace of *The Los Angeles Times* wrote: “Indeed *Howl’s* story line is not always coherent, nor relentlessly upbeat. There is a contorted Good-versus-Evil struggle for the wizard’s soul, and a state of war is the bass line in background that occasionally bursts onto the screen in full crescendo.”

In his review for *The Washington Post*, Stephen Hunter found the plot rather static, among other shortcomings. He noted, “I never feel so utterly fraudulent as when I review a movie whose charms impress all in the world and I simply do not get it . . . Now, I am about to be nailed as the man who disliked *Howl’s Moving Castle*. Lord, give me strength!



Also, IT, please disconnect the email thing." He added, "The movie made almost no sense whatever to me. I literally could not follow it, even as I was dazzled by it. I waited for two solid hours for it to begin. Then it occurred to me: It has begun . . . There is no story, or rather, there's no force to the story, which meanders almost casually this way and that for no apparent reason. When it finishes, you wonder why it went where it went, if it can even be said to have gone there." Hunter likewise faulted the film's cast—made up mostly of British actors (Bale, Mortimer, and Simmons)—none of whom "registered to my ear" and suggested the film was best seen with its original Japanese vocal performances in place.

Writer Joe Morgenstern of *The Wall Street Journal* said that Hayao's latest feature required "a readjustment of expectations," he wrote. "Not downward, necessarily, but focused on the film's many beauties and wonders, rather than its own narrative, which lacks the clarity of Studio Ghibli's greatest works."

Despite its complicated story line that many audiences misunderstood, Hayao stood by the end result. As he told Steve Daly of *Entertainment Weekly*, "I don't provide unnecessary explanations. If you want that, you're not going to like my movie. That's just the way it is."

Throughout this period, tributes and honors continued to roll in, recognizing Hayao's remarkable career and body of work. On June 6 of that year, four days before the American release of *Howl's Moving Castle*, he was feted with a month-long festival of all of his movies at New York City's Museum of Modern Art. That year the Venice International Film Festival also awarded him its Golden Lion lifetime achievement award.

Afterward Hayao returned to making short films, a few minutes long, only shown in the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka City, Tokyo. Some favorites included the music promotion film *On You Mark*, released that year as part of the DVD anthology collection *Studio Ghibli Shorts*.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Later that year Chinese media reported that Hayao's final film project would be *I Lost My Little Boy*, based on a Chinese children's book, news that later proved false.

In 2006, despite his father's disapproval, his son Goro directed his first anime film, *Tales from Earthsea*, based on stories by Ursula K. Le Guin, a project Hayao had wanted to produce in the 1980s. In fact, several times he sought permission from Le Guin to produce a book-to-film version, but the author refused each time. In 2001, after having given up his job as managing director of the Ghibli Museum a year earlier, Hayao revisited the idea of producing the *Earthsea* project. He had produced *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* and *The Journey of Shuna (Shuna no Tabi)* in its place, instead using some of the ideas he had for a film based on Le Guin's work. When Le Guin finally requested that he produce an anime adaptation of her work, Hayao refused as he had lost his desire to do so.

Hayao and Goro were not on speaking terms during the production. As Goro told *The Los Angeles Times*, "To be honest, we're not that close; we don't know how to communicate."

The dispute was over whether Hayao thought his son was ready to direct. Hayao had decided to produce the film but then demurred as he was in the middle of production on *Howl's Moving Castle*. Studio Ghibli's powerful producer Tushio Suzuki made the decision afterward to hand the reigns to the project to Goro, who had not headed a single animated film. Many young Ghibli animators were resistant to work with him at first, seeing his appointment as a blatant case of paternalism. Others did not like him invading his famous father's turf due to his lack of experience in having never directed a film and never having worked in the animation industry. Hayao was "appalled," his son said, after hearing the news he was going to direct the feature.

Despite the father-son clash overshadowing the production, the 39-year-old novice stepped out of the shadow of his iconic father and delivered. Released in Japan on July 29, 2006, *Tales from Earthsea* became a huge commercial success and a top-drawing film the first four of its five weeks after premiering the previous Sunday at the Venice Film Festival. Hayao never spoke directly to his son about his success. "I heard from other people that he thought it was an honest film," Goro said at the time, "but frankly I think it was wise he never said anything to me directly. We would probably have ended up shouting and fighting. It would have been a messy situation."



Goro brushed away any similarities between the movie—which opens with a son’s murder of his father—and his real-life relationship with his father as simply a coincidence. “No, I never felt I wanted to kill my father,” Hayao’s first-born son said, “because we didn’t have that much of a relationship to begin with.”

News broke later that year that Hayao was planning to direct another anime feature set in Kobe. His team had visited during preproduction an old café run by an elderly couple and viewed the city from high in the mountains. The exact location of these places was censored from Studio Ghibli’s production diaries. The studio also announced that Hayao had begun creating storyboards for the film and that they were being produced in watercolor because the film would have an “unusual visual style.” Production was expected to last about 20 months, with release slated for summer 2008.

In October 2006, Hayao turned author. He wrote the book, *A Trip to Tynemouth*, based on the young adult stories of Robert Westall, who grew up in World War II England, which was published in Japan. The most famous story first published in a collection called *Break of Dark*, is “Blackham’s Wimpy,” featuring Vickers Wellington Bomber. He nicknamed the character after J. Wellington Wimpy from the *Popeye* cartoons and gave him the name Wellington after the 1st Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, famous for his victory over Napoleon.

By 2007, Hayao began preproduction on a new feature film that would return him to movie screens. He was writing and directing the film, and it was first publicly announced that year: *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* (*Gake no ue no Ponyo*). The revered filmmaker formulated the concept for the movie—of a young boy whose home overlooks the water where he befriends a supernatural sea creature beneath the waves—from his time living in a house on a cliff with a spectacular view of Japan’s Inland Sea. As with all of his films, Hayao’s latest fantasy would have a recurring theme and message beneath its imaginative story and setting: the importance of safeguarding the environment. Unlike most films that portray the sea as pristine and full of majesty, his would depict it as man has made it—out of balance and polluted. “All I did is just draw how the sea has become, the way it is in reality,” he later said.



Japanese poster for Hayao's fish-out-of-water tale about a goldfish who wants to become human, originally titled *Ponyo on the Cliff By the Sea*.
© Studio Ghibli

With 70 to 80 percent of the story taking place at sea, in contrast to his recent work, the film would be entirely hand drawn without the benefit of any computer-generated imagery. He had nothing against computer animation. As he said to a reporter through a translator, "The reason hand drawn is so important is that I am only able to do hand drawn."

Consequently Hayao drew the sea and waves himself, and the level of detail in the film resulted in 170,000 separate images, a record for his films.

In July 2008, *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* premiered on movie screens across Japan. As with his previous films, Hayao's latest offered a surrealistic story, this time about a little goldfish that lives in the sea with her father, Fujimoto. He is a wizard who despises man's pollution of his waters and has one mission: to keep the sea in balance. Wanting to become human, his daughter escapes. She washes up in a nearby seaside town and gets caught and then stuck in a jar. A kindhearted five-year-old boy, Sosuke, frees the beautiful goldfish and puts her in a pail of water and afterward calls her Ponyo. Fearful Ponyo will become human, Fujimoto dispatches his magical army of fish to find her. They capture her and return her to her rightful home in the sea with her father. Heartbroken, Sosuke is comforted by his mother, Lisa. But Ponyo remains determined to become a little girl and return to Sosuke. She endures a huge storm by riding on the backs of giant fish in the threatening seas so they are reunited. After her father recognizes the fact she is the Goddess of Mercy, Ponyo's mother, Granmamare, helps her fulfill her wish only after Sosuke passes a test. He succeeds and she is successfully transformed into human form after which she temporarily reverts back to a fish. It is because of Sosuke's love for her—and after kissing her—that she happily becomes human once again.

Audiences largely embraced this fish-out-of-water tale, Hayao's 10th Studio Ghibli film. Produced at a cost of 3.4 billion yen (\$34 million in American currency), *Ponyo on a Cliff* grossed five times its budget at box offices, 15 billion yen or more than \$164 million.

Critics praised the movie's simple theme and visual elements, comparing it favorably to Hayao's animated classic *My Neighbor Totoro*.

The Japan Times gave it four stars. In late August, the film was also an entrant in the 65th Venice International Film Festival where critics generally gave it high praise. Wendy Ide of *The Times of London* awarded the movie four stars, calling it "as chaotic and exuberant as a story told by a hyperactive toddler."

At the 8th annual Tokyo Anime Awards in 2009, it came as little surprise when *Ponyo on a Cliff* won five major awards, including "Anime of the Year" and "Best Domestic Feature." The legendary Japanese animator was also awarded for "Best Director" and "Best Original Story." At the 32nd Japan Academy Prize, Japan's equivalent to the Oscars, the movie took two more honors for "Animation of the Year" and "Outstanding Achievement in Music."

Earlier in 2009, the 68-year-old anime legend wrote and illustrated a new manga, *The Wind Rises* (*Kaze Tachinu*). The story of Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter designer Jiro Horikoshi, it was published in the February 25 and March 25 issues *Model Graphix* magazine. Meanwhile, later that year, work neared completion on Disney's Americanized version of *Ponyo*.

SHARING HIS LEGACY

In early July 2009, Viz Media published the long-awaited English translation of Hayao's 500-page book, *Starting Point: 1979–1996*. A collection of columns and essays he had written covering his work in animation, it describes with frankness and honesty the creation of many of his masterworks that he directed and produced, including *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Porco Rosso*, and many more.

Seldom traveling outside of Japan and rarely craving publicity, the 68-year-old animator, with nearly 20 features to his credit, made a surprise trip to the United States after accepting three invitations to promote the book's American release. In an extraordinary step, the private animator agreed to address 6,500 admiring fans at the 40th Comic-Con International convention on July 24, in San Diego, California. Long-time fan of his work John Lasseter, the chief creative officer of Pixar and



Foreword by John Lasseter, director of *Toy Story*

STARTING POINT: 1979 ~ 1996

Translated by Frederik L. Schodt and Beth Carey



HAYAO MIYAZAKI

In July 2009, Viz Media published the long-awaited English version of *Starting Point: 1979 – 1996*, a collection of columns and essays discussing Hayao's prodigious career. (Courtesy: Viz Media)

Disney Animation Studios, appeared on stage with Hayao as part of a special animation presentation that included a glimpse of *Ponyo* and other upcoming Disney and Pixar films, including *Toy Story 3*, *Beauty and the Beast 3-D*, and *The Princess and the Frog*.

The event was a prelude to Hayao's appearance the following day at the University of California, Berkeley, in Northern California, where Duncan Williams, chairman of its Center for Japanese Studies, presented him with its Japan Prize, awarded each year to "a person who had brought the world closer to Japan." Three days later the ageless animator was honored at the 13th Marc Davis Celebration of Animation by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills, following a special Hollywood screening of *Ponyo* for film industry people the previous evening. During his appearance, Lasseter, who executive produced the English-translated version, interviewed the master animator at the academy for attendees at the sold-out event.

On August 14, 2009, Disney released its English-translated version, simply titled *Ponyo*, to theaters. To expand its audience, the studio distributed the film more widely to 927 screens and multiplexes across the country and in Canada. It was by far the widest release for a Studio Ghibli and Miyazaki film in the United States, compared to *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, and *Princess Mononoke*, which opened in 26, 36, and 38 theaters, respectively. Disney also cross-promoted the movie on The Disney Channel and Disney.com and lined up a much stronger and more recognizable star-studded voice cast, including Matt Damon, Tina Fey, Cate Blanchett, Liam Neeson, Betty White, Lily Tomlin, and Cloris Leachman, and next-generation stars Miley Cyrus's nine-year-old sister, Noah, as *Ponyo*, and Frankie Jonas, the youngest sibling of the Jonas Brothers music trio, as the young boy, Sosuke.

Despite the widespread publicity and larger distribution, *Ponyo* only took in \$3.5 million its opening weekend—an average of \$3,868 per screen. By the end of its theatrical run, the film translated into a total take of \$15 million at the box office.

Critics were mostly complimentary. Film critic Roger Ebert gave *Ponyo* four out of five stars, noting, "There is a word to describe *Ponyo*, and that word is magical. This poetic, visually breathtaking work by the





During his appearance at Comic-Con, Hayao displays the prestigious Inkpot Award he received.

greatest of all animators has such deep charm that adults and children will both be touched. It's wonderful and never even seems to try: it unfolds fantastically." *The Christian Science Monitor's* Peter Rainer raved, "*Ponyo* is one of the rare new family-entertainment movies that works equally well for adults and children. The film's mixture of childlike fancifulness and grown-up complication will ensure this." Jane Horwitz of *The Washington Post* hailed it as "a stunning and fantastical film."

Others were not nearly as enthralled. As Associated Press critic Christy Lemire chimed, "The hand-drawn images can be wondrous and inventive as they are in all of Miyazaki's films, but this story of a

goldfish who longs to be a little girl lacks the sophisticated depth and engaging weirdness of his most acclaimed and best-known work."

In September 2009, reports circulated that Hayao had signed on with Studio Ghibli to direct two more anime features over the next three years. By completion of the last project under the deal, he would be 71 years of age. Though no details were provided of his next work, he had indicated that June that he was planning to produce anime shorts for the Ghibli Museum and was considering doing one of them based on a classic Japanese folktale about sumo-wrestling mice. Previously, in July 2008, he also had begun planning, producing, and supervising production of a new feature—this time one that he would not direct—a screen adaptation of author Mary Norton's Carnegie Medal-winning 1952 novel, *The Borrower Arrietty* (*Karigurashi no Arrietty*), about a diminutive family who live underneath the floorboards of an English country house where they borrow small items from the big human people.

Though some anime enthusiasts fretted over the absence of Hayao in the director's chair, the artistry of the final work alleviated such concerns. Marking the directorial debut of his 37-year-old key animator Hiromasa Yonebayashi, the youngest person in the studio's history to direct a film, this breezy, fanciful adventure was released on July 17, 2010, in Japan, where it racked up \$15.5 million in tickets sales on 447 screens and took the first place at the box office.

In a career full of triumphs, Hayao has proven he is more than an animation virtuoso and as some have called him "the Walt Disney of Japan" (a description that makes him bristle in interviews). As Tim Morrison of *Time* magazine astutely wrote: "Miyazaki is Walt Disney, Steven Spielberg, and Orson Welles combined, with a dash of Claude Monet in his sumptuous landscapes and more than a smidgen of Roald Dahl in his sly, sophisticated understanding of children."

For the elusive, silver-haired animator, his dreamed-up eccentricities on screen reflect his true spirit and his true self. As the outspoken director once said, "My process is thinking, thinking, and thinking—thinking about stories for a long time . . . To have a film where there's an evil figure and a good person fights against the evil figure and everything becomes a happy ending, that's one way to make a film. But then



Hayao speaks to a sold-out audience at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' 13th Marc Davis Celebration of Animation honoring him in Beverly Hills, California. (Photo: Marc Wawrychuk) © AMAAS

that means you have to draw, as an animator, the evil figure. And it's not very pleasant to draw evil figures. So I decided against evil figures in my films."

Fascination with Hayao's popular and subversive work runs deep around the world and has become an integral part of American culture. His gloriously imaginative films (which he prefers people to not call "anime," and to use that term to describe lesser quality made-for-television Japanese animation instead) and mangas and their inherent moral philosophies and characteristics traditionally celebrated in

Japanese culture have spawned increasing scrutiny and analysis. In the world of academia, more papers have been written on him in the United States than any other Japanese artist. Hayao humbly admits, "I don't intentionally make deep movies. It's not that I set out to make a film that deals with myths, but as I develop the story, aspects of older stories or myths enter into the story."

Instead, Hayao, who admits he no longer watches movies or animation or reads mangas, makes films for a simple reason: for Japanese audiences, mostly children, and for broad audiences to enjoy. More times than not, he has achieved the results he desired.

As an avid young fan of his films after a screening of his latest enterprise said, "I often forget to breathe, I'm so spellbound, so enchanted."

The best movies are those that provoke such reflection. They portray excellent values in creative, lively, and compelling ways without being sanctimonious, and they create interesting, living characters that grow and reveal new aspects of themselves and transcend the beauty and ugliness that surrounds them. Hayao's painterly aesthetic and hand-drawn and deeply intricate fantasy worlds mixing myths, environmental awakenings, shape-shifting spirits, independent, resourceful and postapocalyptic young heroines, and complex human characters and fanciful flying machines shall live on for these reasons and more. His age-old disciplines and methods and time-honored values of courage, dignity, kindness, integrity, perseverance, and quiet fortitude will continue to ascend in the world and shine in whatever medium reflects them. Whether he likes it or not, he has secured his place in the universe as Japan's premiere storyteller and animation master and left the world all the more enchanted in his wake.

SELECTED RESOURCES



For further study of Hayao Miyazaki's work and career, the following resources are recommended:

Filmography

Hayao Miyazaki Filmography (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0594503/filmography>)

This current filmography provides titles, credits, release dates, and synopses of every production from Miyazaki's storied career.

Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata Filmography (<http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/films/filmography.html>)

This comprehensive and chronological list covers every anime film and television series on which Miyazaki and his partner Isao Takahata have worked together during their long careers. Films are listed by their premiere date, length, type (feature, TV, or short film), and their respective roles on each production.

DVD & Video Collections

Castle in the Sky (Buena Vista Home Video, 2003)

Miyazaki's third feature, this 1986 fantasy adventure (originally titled *Laputa: The Castle in the Sky* in Japan), inspired by the children's classic *Gulliver's Travels*, was responsible for establishing the famed animator as a visionary in his country and in America. This DVD release features the English-language version.

The Castle of Cagliostro (Manga Video, 2000)

Also known as *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*, this 1979 feature, cowritten and directed by Miyazaki, is considered the most famous of his films featuring the master thief, Lupin III. The version, available on DVD, is the second English-dubbed film produced in 2000.

Howl's Moving Castle (Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2006)

This two-disc special DVD edition features both the original Japanese and English-language soundtracks to Miyazaki's book-to-screen adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones's juvenile novel and third top-grossing film in Japanese history about an ordinary 18-year-old girl who lives a drab existence until a witch transforms her into a 90-year-old woman and she searches for a way to break the spell over her. The disc also features the featurette *Behind the Microphone*, including interviews with the American voice cast and footage from the dubbing sessions; the bonus feature *Hayao Miyazaki Visits Pixar Animation Studios* with Pixar director John Lasseter, and much more.

Kiki's Delivery Service (Walt Disney Home Video, 2003)

Originally released in Japan in 1989, this charming and magical fantasy charts a life-affirming, coming-of-age journey of an imaginative and resourceful 13-year-old apprentice witch in her everyday struggles to find herself and her purpose in the world. This DVD edition includes the English-dubbed version starring an all-American voice cast.

My Neighbor Totoro (20th Century Fox Home Video, 2004)

Written and directed by Miyazaki, this delightful 1988 family film about two sisters who befriend a giant forest spirit that becomes their protector as they embark on an enchanted journey was a breakout hit and enormously popular in Japan and in the United States.

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2007)

Adapted two years later from his 1982 manga series, this anime feature gained widespread attention in Japan for its ecological message. This

DVD edition features the English-dubbed version, presenting the film in its entirety.

Ponyo (Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2010)

Loosely based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, this heartwarming and imaginative tale—originally called *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* in Japan—tells the timeless tale of a young boy who rescues a goldfish and their fantastic journey afterward of friendship and discovery. This single-DVD disc includes other bonus material, including *Behind the Studio*, featuring documentaries and all-new interviews with the master animator himself.

Princess Mononoke (Walt Disney Home Video, 2000)

Miyazaki's epic fantasy, first released in Japan in 1997, which made history as the top-grossing feature ever released in its native country, combines Japanese folklore and mythical themes about a cursed young warrior who becomes engaged in a bitter battle with a brave young woman raised by wolves against the forest's animal gods. This single DVD disc features the American-dubbed version.

Spirited Away (Walt Disney Home Video, 2003)

Winner of an Academy Award in 2002 for "Best Animated Feature" and the highest-grossing film in Japanese box-office history, this dazzling and wondrous masterpiece—in the mold of the classic tale *Alice in Wonderland*—takes a young girl, Chihiro, on an unforgettable adventure into a strange new world, where she finds the courage to save her parents and return them to their real-life world. Among the DVD disc's bonus features are the Nippon TV special *The Making of 'Spirited Away'*, and original Japanese movie trailers.

The Wonderful World of Puss 'N Boots (Discotek Media, 2006)

Originally produced in 1969 in Japan, and later released as *The Wonderful World of Puss 'n Boots* in the United States, this film, directed by Kimio Yabuki, features key animation by Miyazaki in the early days of his career.

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Photo courtesy: Brian Maurer.

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