

# DECODING THE WILDERPEOPLE

THE JUNIOR CYCLE SURVIVAL GUIDE TO TAIKA WAITITI'S MASTERPIECE

Ricky Baker  
Hector Faulkner

Aotearoa  
Cinema!

DIRECTOR'S  
VISION

SURVIVAL MODE:  
ACTIVATED



No Child  
Left Behind...  
except for us.

TRACKING SHOTS  
& MONTAGE

STORYBOARD  
PANEL 1

FILM ANALYST  
TOOLKIT

THEME: BELONGING

# THE "REAL BAD EGG"

CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

## RAP-SHEET

- graffiti
- kicking things
- truancy
- disobedience

Paula and the authorities view Ricky as a "spitfire" and a "menace." He is just a file to them.

DEHUMANIZING

JUST A STATISTIC

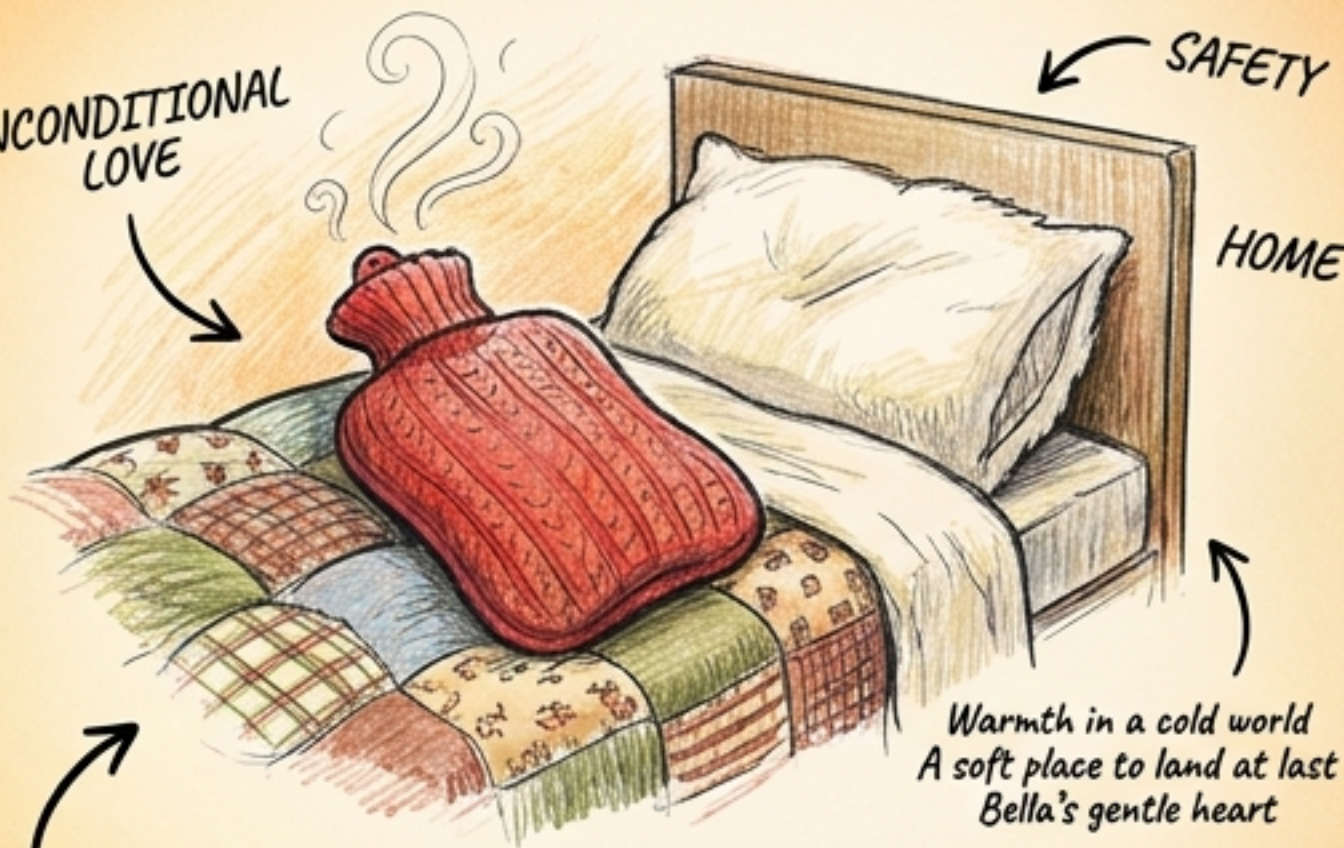
LABELING

# THE HOT WATER BOTTLE

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

SAFETY

HOME



Bella offers breakfast and comfort instead of punishment. This is Ricky's first experience of genuine, non-judgmental kindness.

## DIRECTOR'S TOOLKIT: JUXTAPOSITION



Waititi smashes opposites together. He places Ricky's hilarious, happy birthday party right next to Bella's sudden, tragic death to make the emotional loss feel overwhelmingly sudden to the audience.

WHIPLASH EFFECT



# The Outlaw Trail

They entered the bush as runaways. They emerged as the Wilderpeople.



# ANOTHER DOOR: THE FAKED DEATH

①



**THE THREAT:**  
Child Welfare sends a letter. Hec rejects Ricky. The door on safety closes.

②



**THE 'GANGSTA' PLAN:**  
Build a straw dummy.  
Burn the barn. Leave a poorly written suicide note.

③



**THE REALITY:**  
He accidentally burns it too fast and flees with only his dog (Tupac) and a bag of Knacker biscuits.

**DIRECTOR'S TOOLKIT:**  
COMEDY VS. DRAMA

Ricky's escape is born from deep grief and the terror of the care system. Yet, Waititi makes the execution hilariously clumsy. This signature style finds humor in the middle of a crisis.

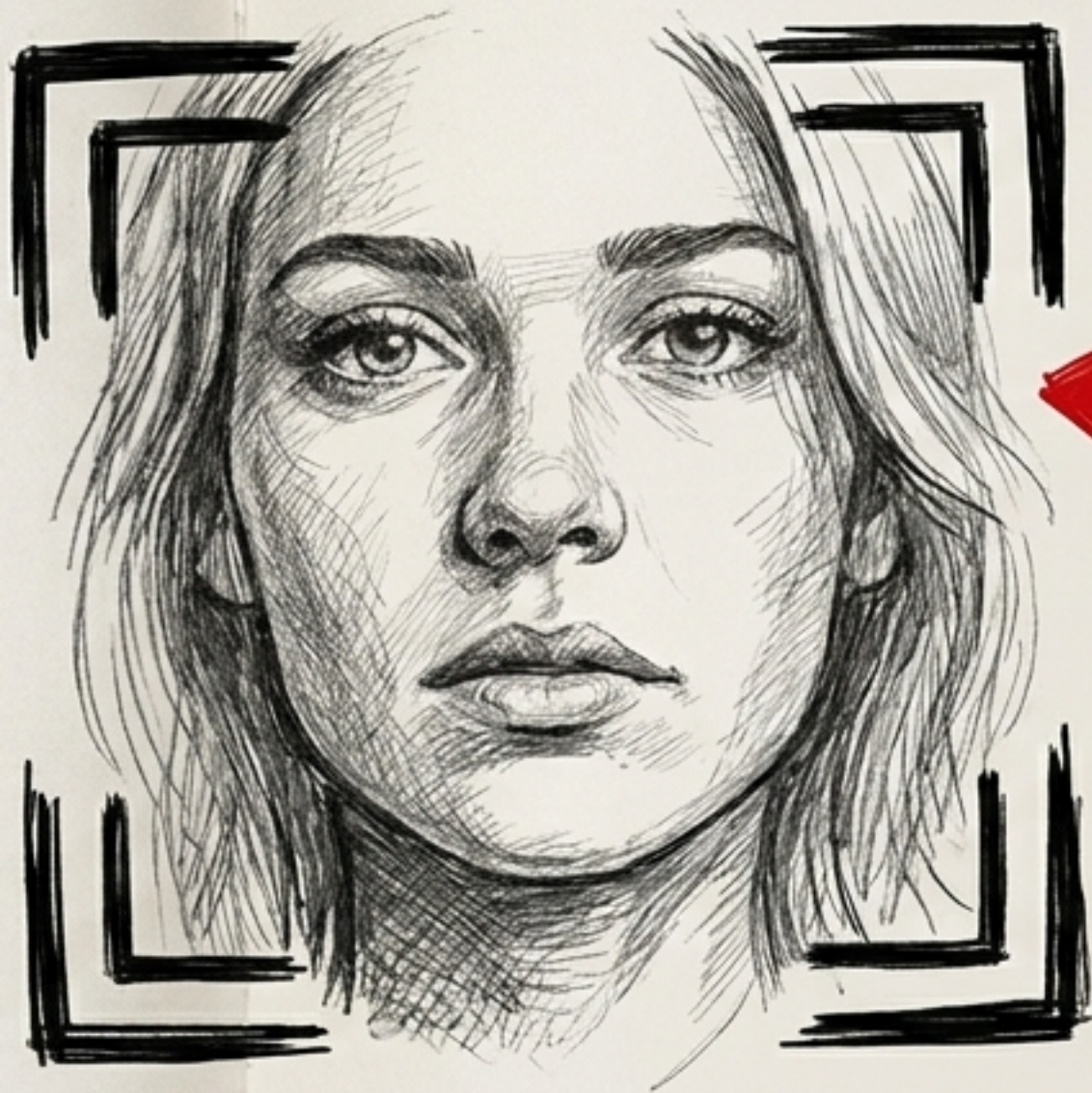
## Literacy vs. "The Knack"

Ricky uses slang to feel big  
but reads well. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

Hec struggles with reading but  
possesses "The Knack"—a  
deep, instinctive wilderness  
intelligence. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

### The Context:

Ricky shares the tragic story of  
Amber, revealing why he acts out.  
The care system treated her like  
a replaceable file.



### **Director's Toolkit: The Close-Up & Show, Don't Tell**

Hec refuses to talk  
about his feelings,  
showing "old-school"  
toxic toughness. But  
Waititi uses a tight  
close-up on Hec's secret  
drawing to prove his  
profound grief without  
a single line of dialogue.

# FAMOUS: SATIRE & THE TWISTING OF TRUTH

## THE REALITY



Ricky tries to sound tough: "He does things to me." He means chores; the hunters hear abuse. Language divides them.

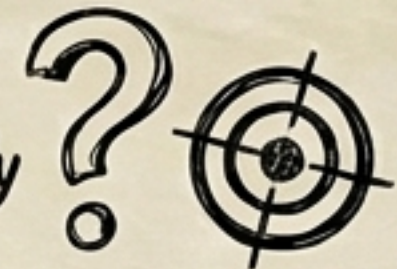
## THE MEDIA SPIN



Paula creates a pantomime villain narrative on national TV. She chants "No child left behind" while caring only about the fame of the chase, not Ricky's welfare.

## KEY INSIGHT: IRONY

Ricky finally feels "wanted" and gets an identity—but only because he is being hunted by an entire country.



# Core Theme: Bureaucracy vs. Empathy

## The System (Paula)

RED TAPE

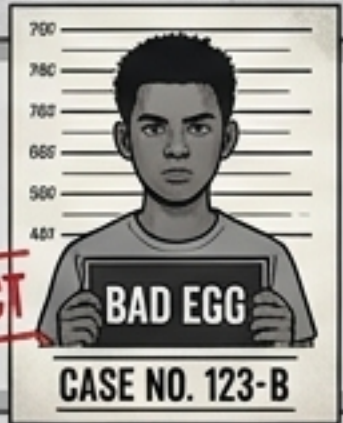
**Motivation:** Follows rules and forms. Cares about public image and catchphrases.

Public Persona > People



**View of Ricky:** A "bad egg," a "spitfire," a file to be managed.

MANAGE, DON'T CONNECT



**Method:** Punishment and Juvenile Detention ("Juvee").

Isolation = Correction?

PUNISH



## The Empaths (Bella & Hec)

Heart & Home

**Motivation:** Shared pain. Bella was an "outsider" too; Hec is an infertile ex-con.

Shared Trauma

Understanding



**View of Ricky:** Hec tells Ricky he is actually "pretty likeable."

"pretty likeable"

Seen as a PERSON

Positive Reinforcement



**Method:** Comfort (hot water bottles, breakfasts) and mutual respect.

Nurture

Comfort First

Respect = Trust



The Director's Question: Which approach actually heals?

# A NORMAL LIFE VS. THE WILDERPEOPLE

**A NORMAL LIFE**

*fork in the road*

**THE WILDERPEOPLE**

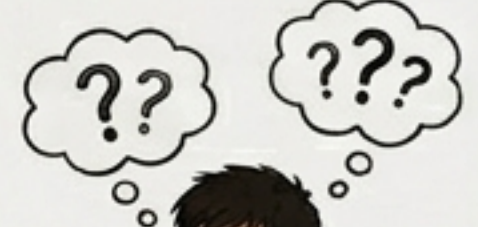
DECISION POINT

The Setup: Ricky meets Kahu and TK. He has sausages, a warm fire, and a chance for a safe life.



The Selfie: Even in the remote country, the modern world intrudes. TK treats Ricky like a trendy celebrity, turning human trauma into entertainment.

The Lie & The Choice: Ricky claims he "doesn't think about" his mother to protect his feelings. But in the middle of the night, he abandons safety to return to Hec.



Rebellious Act: Leaving the comfort zone.



You don't trade family for anything.

Core Theme: Loyalty & Belonging.

# SCENE ANATOMY: Grief and Pathetic Fallacy



16:9 storyboard 16:9. Zealand bush

## THE EVENTS

- Ricky saves Hec by shooting the wild boar.
- Zag is fatally wounded; Hec puts him out of his misery.
- They scatter Bella's ashes at Zag's grave. Hec treats Ricky as an equal: "Thanks for bringing her, mate."



SCENE: Zag's Grave & Bella's Ashes  
- Snowfall Begins.

Weather = Grief


## DIRECTOR'S TOOLKIT: Pathetic Fallacy

The director makes the weather mirror the characters' emotions. As they mourn Zag and Bella, it begins to snow. The freezing, wintry landscape amplifies the cold, lonely finality of death.

(Coupled with a shift from quirky synth-pop to slow, mournful music).

# Character Arc: Ricky Baker

## Before (The "Gangsta")



**Traits:** Defensive, hides behind hip-hop slang, uses humor to block the trauma of being discarded by the foster system.



## After (The Family Member)

**Rebellious Act:** Embracing the bush life and family.



**Traits:** Loyal, brave, values his broken family. He drops the "tough guy" shield.

**The Haiku:**  
Forced by therapists;  
written as a joke  
to get out of  
trouble.

*Trees, birds, rivers, sky*  
*Running with my Uncle Hec*  
*Living forever.*



Director's Notes:  
Character  
Development

# Character Arc: Uncle Hec

## Before (The Loner)



DIRECTOR'S  
NOTES:  
GROWTH

Avoiding a  
"old-school"  
future

- Traits: Grumpy, closed-off, illiterate. Uses short, blunt sentences to push people away.
- Shows toxic "old-school" toughness to hide his grief.

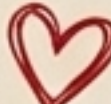

CHARACTER  
EVOLUTION

## After (The Father Figure)

- The Catalyst: In Chapter 9 (The Turning of the Tide), Hec warns against ending up like Psycho Sam (a cautionary tale of total isolation).

Avoiding a  
bad future



- The Reveal: Hec admits he is infertile and life is "unfair." He validates Ricky by telling him he is "pretty likeable." 
- The Result: By the Epilogue, Hec has learned to read and writes his own haiku. He accepts connection. 

# Scene Anatomy: "War" and Hyperbole

FILM ANALYSIS // SCENE BREAKDOWN

Panel 1



Comedic

Overkill

Confrontation

The Tank (Hyperbole): Extreme exaggeration. Sending an army (and Paula in a tank) for one man and a boy is farcical. It mocks the authorities and reflects Ricky's cartoonish worldview.

Panel 2



Confrontation?

Reversal of Direction = Change of Heart

The Handbrake Turn (Visual Metaphor): Ricky stops running away. Driving towards the police symbolizes him finally facing his problems head-on.

Panel 3



Broken

Junk

End of the Road

Broken

The Scrapyard Crash (Symbolism): Society viewed Hec (ex-con) and Ricky (bad egg) as "discards" or junk. The crash forces them to stop being outlaws and face reality.

FILM ANALYSIS // SCENE BREAKDOWN

Director's Notes: Scene Analysis

# The Director's Toolkit: Object Symbolism

FILM ANALYSIS // OBJECT SYMBOLISM



**SYMBOL OF COMFORT**

The Hot Water Bottle: Comfort, warmth, and the motherly, non-judgmental love Ricky never had.

**MOTHERLY FIGURE**

**MUSEUM DISPLAY**



INVASIVE MEDIA

FAKE CONNECTION

MODERN WORLD

**DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

The Selfie (with TK): The invasive modern world. Represents the media turning real human tragedy into disposable entertainment.

**DECODING MEANING**



CHOOSING HOME DOMESTICITY

The Toothbrush (Epilogue): A small, domestic item that signifies Hec finally choosing "home" and belonging over merely "surviving."

HEC'S CHOICE

**MUSEUM DISPLAY**



HOPE & BEAUTY

EXTINCT PARTS

The Huia Bird: Thought to be extinct. Represents the "extinct" parts of themselves (hope, family, beauty) they are finally ready to find.

SPIRIT ANIMAL

**Director's Notes: Scene Analysis**

FILM ANALYSIS // OBJECT SYMBO

## Ricky in a bright, warm, fast-paced home.



Positive energy

Rapid cuts

Sunlight = Hope

## Hec in a cold, grey, slow-paced prison.



Color & Pacing = Emotional Weight

Sacrifice made tangible

Static shots = Confinement



Me and this fat kid  
We ran, we ate and read books  
And it was the best

## Redemption: The power dynamic shifts

Ricky apologizes. The new rules: Ricky gets to call him "Uncle."  
Ricky is not allowed to shoot him again. They are a true family.

Director's Notes:  
Scene Analysis

# Junior Cycle Exam Toolkit

FILM ANALYSIS // EXAM PREP

## Director's Vocabulary (Use these words!)

- ✓ - Juxtaposition (putting opposites together)
- ✓ - Hyperbole & Farce (extreme exaggeration, like the tank)
- ✓ - Pathetic Fallacy (weather reflecting mood, like the snow)
- ✓ - Satire (mocking the system via Paula)

## Core Themes

- ✓ Empathy vs. Bureaucracy, Found Family, The Power of Language (Slang vs. Haikus).

## Pro-Tip

Don't just say what happened; say how the director showed it. (e.g., "Waititi uses a close-up of Hec's drawing to show his hidden grief, rather than using dialogue.")

Director's Notes:  
Toolkit