

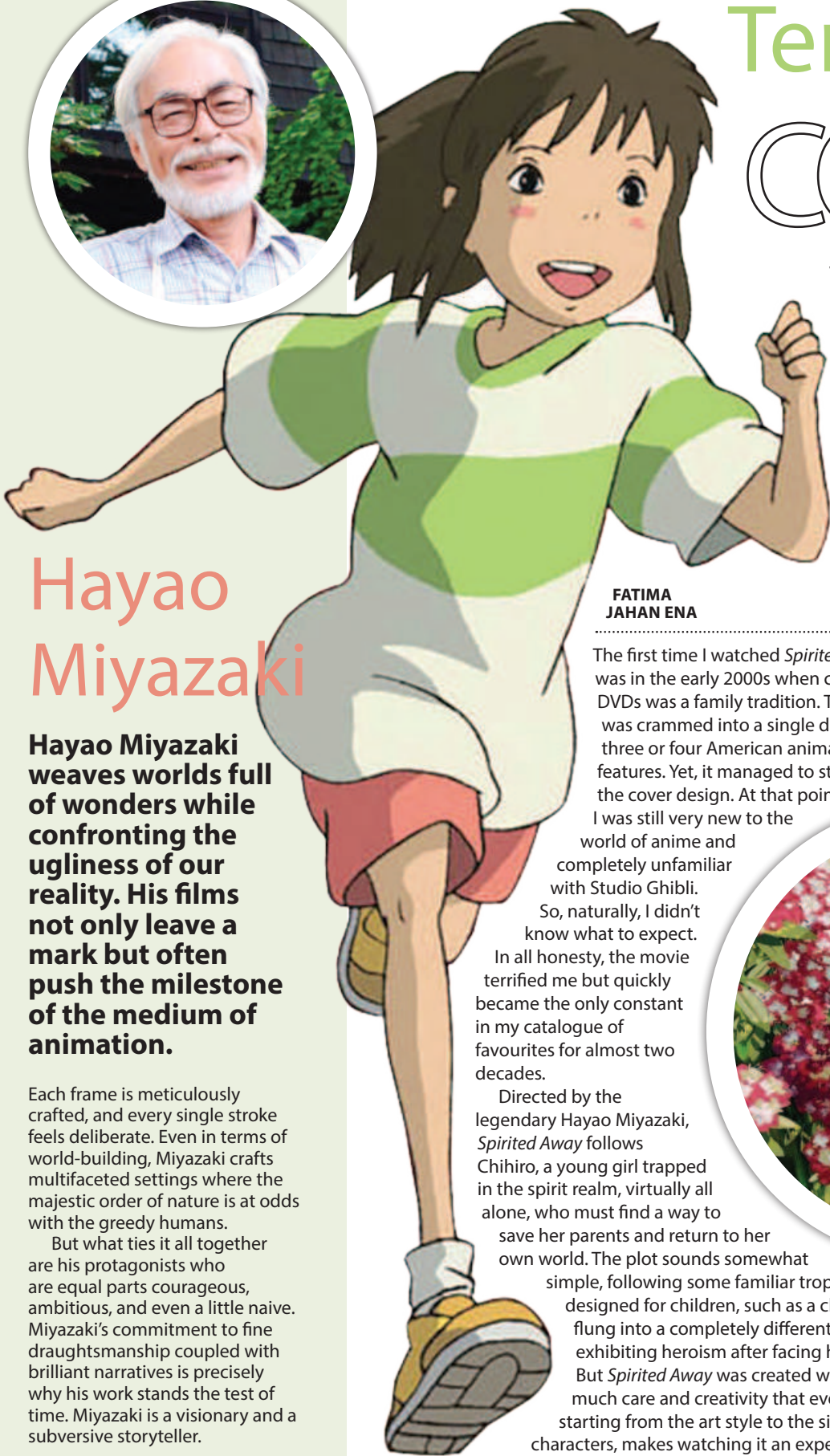


Hayao Miyazaki

Hayao Miyazaki weaves worlds full of wonders while confronting the ugliness of our reality. His films not only leave a mark but often push the milestone of the medium of animation.

Each frame is meticulously crafted, and every single stroke feels deliberate. Even in terms of world-building, Miyazaki crafts multifaceted settings where the majestic order of nature is at odds with the greedy humans.

But what ties it all together are his protagonists who are equal parts courageous, ambitious, and even a little naive. Miyazaki's commitment to fine draughtsmanship coupled with brilliant narratives is precisely why his work stands the test of time. Miyazaki is a visionary and a subversive storyteller.



FATIMA JAHAN ENA

The first time I watched *Spirited Away* was in the early 2000s when collecting DVDs was a family tradition. The movie was crammed into a single disk with three or four American animated features. Yet, it managed to stand out in the cover design. At that point, I was still very new to the world of anime and completely unfamiliar with Studio Ghibli. So, naturally, I didn't know what to expect.

In all honesty, the movie terrified me but quickly became the only constant in my catalogue of favourites for almost two decades.

Directed by the legendary Hayao Miyazaki, *Spirited Away* follows Chihiro, a young girl trapped in the spirit realm, virtually all alone, who must find a way to save her parents and return to her own world. The plot sounds somewhat simple, following some familiar tropes designed for children, such as a child being flung into a completely different world and exhibiting heroism after facing hardships. But *Spirited Away* was created with so much care and creativity that everything, starting from the art style to the side characters, makes watching it an experience that should not be missed.

Terrifying yet COMFORTING

What makes *Spirited Away* a must-watch?

In my personal experience, the movie's visuals and premise terrified me when I was a child. This was mainly attributed to the fact that, at that time, I was only used to the animation and storytelling styles of Disney and Cartoon Network, which often tried to comfort the viewer. *Spirited Away* did the exact opposite but still managed to be comforting in its own special way. I was uncomfortable, scared, but completely mesmerised. The events of the movie were meant to show exactly how terrible of a situation Chihiro is in, with several small challenges leading up to the final challenge, and it excels at causing tension for the viewer as well. You're constantly at the edge of your seat, trying to predict what will happen next and how Chihiro can handle it. But the stress is also accompanied by Studio Ghibli's signature moments of peace, whether it be a tea party in a quaint cottage or a tranquil train ride across the ocean.

Another aspect of the movie that I did not grasp as a child would be the characters. As an adult, I now understand that Studio Ghibli movies, especially those helmed by Miyazaki, use the animated medium to create incredibly relatable, believable characters who exist in fantastical settings. In *Spirited Away*, Chihiro is just a little kid. She begins the movie by sulking and complaining but exhibits extreme kindness and bravery as the movie goes on. This paints a very realistic picture of what it's actually like being a kid – being annoyed, being scared, but also being brave and compassionate. Other characters in the movie, even if they have limited screen time or dialogue, are written with just as much complexity and never feel one-dimensional.

At the heart of it, *Spirited Away* is a movie made exactly for children, but in the best way possible. It does not shy away from talking about complex issues while still being a wholly entertaining watch. The movie doesn't try to talk down to the target demographic either, unlike a lot of other animated features. One of the central themes of the movie is to preserve your own identity in the face of adversity, which can resonate with both children and adults alike. Even now, after years of being an avid lover of movies, I still haven't watched many films which managed to retain the same level of pure wonder and inspiration after so many years. So, it's probably safe to say that *Spirited Away* is one of the rare gems which will probably continue to be amazing for many more years to come.



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