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Away review – silent, surreal and entrancing animation

★★★★★

This silent adventure film about a man who parachutes out of a plane and lands on an island is both wondrous and weird – see it before Tenet



▲ Silent wonder ... the animated feature *Away*

If you have ever sat through the end credits of a mainstream cartoon feature, whether it's because your kid kicked their shoes under the row in front or because you're a trade-magazine critic measuring the running time to the minute, you'll know that there are

normally hundreds of people who work on these productions. Animating lends itself to finely divisible units of labour, even as it becomes ever more reliant on computers. But technology now also makes it possible for one extremely determined Latvian film-maker to make something wondrous and original in a home studio. It took Gints Zilbalodis some three-and-a-half years to make this crisp, entrancing 75-minute animated feature about a young man who falls out of a plane with a parachute and lands on an island inhabited by friendly birds, turtles and cats – but also a giant shadow monster whose touch instantly kills all life. Luckily, the nameless hero finds a motorcycle and takes off on a journey across the oddly volcanic landscape, (Lanzarote was one visual touchstone), managing to always stay mere metres ahead of the monster.



Not a word is spoken throughout, which harkens back to an older era of cinematic storytelling. At the same time, the extreme frame-to-frame fluidity of the computer-assisted animation style, composed entirely of fields of subtly modulated colour, no outlines and minimal modelling, looks completely 21st century. The story is fairytale simple and quite strange, and it's no surprise to hear that Zilbalodis made it up as he went along. Only towards the end did he realise he was making an allegory about his struggle to complete the film itself. He even wrote the synth-generated music heard here, nothing fancy or complicated with its repetitious chords and phrases, but still oddly potent, recalling the work of the modern minimalists ([Philip Glass](#), [Max Richter](#), [Jóhann Jóhannsson](#) and so on) that were his inspirations. If you're going to take a risk at going out to a cinema to see one movie, don't bother with [Christopher Nolan's Tenet](#); see this

instead in a darkened theatre on a big screen.

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