



Princess Mononoke

Princess Mononoke is a 1997 Japanese animated historical fantasy feature film written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki

“**Mononoke**” is not a name, but a Japanese term for spirit or monster.

The story is about the outsider, **Ashitaka**, who gets involved in the struggle between the supernatural guardians of a forest and the humans of the Iron Town who consume its resources.

There is no good and evil in this struggle, and our sympathies keep switching from side to side. There can be no clear victory, because the relationship between humans and nature is cyclical.

The Characters

- * **Prince Ashitaka**, the last prince of the Emishi tribe
- * **Yakul**, Prince Ashitaka’s red elk
- * **Nago**, a giant boar demon that attacks Ashitaka’s village and poisons Ashitaka
- * **Jigo**, a wandering monk who is really a spy and a hunter
- * **Lady Eboshi**, the leader of **Iron Town**
 - She gives work to lepers and former prostitutes to protect them, but she also wants to destroy the forest.
 - The people of Iron Town are at war with the animals of the forest.
- * **Moro**, a wolf god
- * **San**, a human girl adopted by the wolves.
 - The people of Iron Town call her “**Princess Mononoke**” and “**Wolf Girl.**”
- * **Kodama**, tree spirits
- * **The Forest Spirit**, a “god of life and death”
 - During the day he is a deer. At night he is a shadowy “night-walker.”
- * **Okkoto**, a boar god

The Story

The last Emishi prince, **Ashitaka**, engages in battle with **Nago**, a giant boar demon which is attacking his village. During the fight, Ashitaka is wounded on his arm. After the boar is killed, the village wise woman tells the prince that the wound is cursed and will spread to the rest of his body and kill him. Ashitaka decides to go west to the boar’s land to find a cure for the curse. He cuts his hair, symbolizing his leaving his village. He rides away on **Yakul**, his red elk. Some time later, Ashitaka passes by a village which is being attacked by samurai. Some men attack him, and Ashitaka defends himself. His cursed arm has superhuman strength; his arrows cut off arms and even one man’s head.

In a nearby town, he meets **Jigo**, a wandering monk who helps him buy rice. That evening, the monk tells Ashitaka that he might find help in the **Deer God Forest**, where giant animal gods live. The monk also adds that the forest is a forbidden zone for humans.

In the mountains of the west, there is a town called Iron Town. The people of this town continually cut the forests to make charcoal for the iron factory. There are many battles with the giant forest beasts who are trying to protect their diminishing forest.

In one battle, three giant wolves, led by Moro, the wolf god, attack villagers. They are accompanied by **San**, a human girl adopted by the wolves. In the attack, Moro and several villagers are hurt. The day after the

battle, Ashitaka finds two injured villagers near a river. While rescuing them, he sees San treating Moro's wounds. She disappears quickly. He returns the villagers to Iron Town. On the way, he passes through a forest full of animal gods, including little tree spirits called **kodama**. Also in the forest is the **Forest Spirit**, a "god of life and death", who takes the form of a deer during the day and of a large shadowy "night-walker" at night.

Ashitaka is given a warm welcome when he reaches Iron Town. He learns from **Lady Eboshi**, the leader of Iron Town, that the giant boar which cursed him was once a forest god called **Nago** and that Lady Eboshi had shot the boar, driving it to madness. On hearing this, Ashitaka is filled with rage and must restrain his right arm from killing Lady Eboshi. He is dissuaded from doing so by **lepers** whom Lady Eboshi has taken under her care and employed as gunmakers. She also employs **former prostitutes** in her factory to free them from brothels.

San sneaks into Iron Town and attacks Lady Eboshi. Ashitaka intervenes, using the power of his curse to stop the two sides' fighting. He takes San back to the forest, but he is shot through the chest and is severely wounded. Again, using the power of his curse, he manages to open the gate and to leave the town, but he collapses soon afterward. San presents Ashitaka to the Forest Spirit, who heals his wounds but does not remove the curse.

San soon learns that the boars, under the leadership of the boar god **Okkoto**, are planning another attack on Iron Town. Lady Eboshi prepares for the attack and sets out to destroy the Forest Spirit. It is believed that the head of the Forest Spirit can grant immortality. Jigo reappears, and we learn that he is really interested only in earning money. He wants to take the Forest Spirit's head as a gift to the Emperor. The Emperor has promised that, in return, he will protect Iron Town from greedy men who covet the town's prosperity. Lady Eboshi correctly suspects, however, that the emperor's agents really want to take control of Iron Town.

Ashitaka recovers and falls in love with San. However, Moro, who has been poisoned by the bullet from Lady Eboshi's gun, warns Ashitaka that he cannot save San.

During the battle, the people of Iron Town and the emperor's agents set a trap for the boars and kill many of them. Jigo's hunters use a poisoned iron ball to injure Okkoto, the same as Lady Eboshi did long ago with Nago. San tries to stop Okkoto from turning into a demon and becomes trapped on his snout. Although badly wounded, Moro attacks Okkoto in order to save San. The Forest Spirit appears and kills both Moro and Okkoto, and San is saved. While Ashitaka is cleaning the demon worms from San, Lady Eboshi continues her quest to kill the Forest Spirit. Just as the Forest Spirit is transforming into the night-walker, she shoots off its head. Moro, however, who has revived long enough to make one last strike against her sworn enemy, takes off Lady Eboshi's arm. Jigo manages to retrieve the Forest Spirit's head, but the Forest Spirit's body turns into a lethal black ooze, "the mindless god of death," which begins covering the land and killing everything it touches. The hunters scatter, and the population of Iron Town is forced to flee to the lake as the god destroys the town in search of its head.

Ashitaka and San chase Jigo, catch him, and seize the head. As soon as they return to head to the Forest Spirit, it collapses into the lake, and the land becomes green again. All the lepers and those who have been cursed, including Ashitaka, are healed.

Ashitaka and San have become very good friends, but both of them are unable to give up the life they are used to. They say good-bye but promise to see each other as much as possible.

Ashitaka decides to live in Iron Town, which a reformed Lady Eboshi vows to rebuild into a better, and simpler village.

At the conclusion, a Kodama appears in the healthy forest, showing that life has started again.