

THE RED TURTLE

Original Story and Screenplay by Michael Dudok De Wit

Part I. The man alone.

I.0. The storm.

On the ocean, far out at sea, a storm rages.

A man is there on his own, in the middle of the waves.

A gigantic wave carries him away. He sinks, then reappears near a barrel which he clings on to.

Later, he spots an overturned lifeboat which he struggles over to. Night falls.

The man is suddenly woken by a wave which is bigger than the others and which shatters his boat.

The man is washed up on a beach. He's saved.

I.1. Exploration of the island and its beauty. His survival is ensured.

It's the first day on the island.

The man has fallen asleep on the beach.

His foot is lying on the sand, motionless.

A crab nips it.

The man wakes up with a start, jumps to his feet, and looks around.

The beach seems to stretch to either end of the island.

Day has broken and the sun is bright.

The man sees something a bit further away. He starts running along the shore. But what he took to be a human body is only a rock, half-buried under the sand.

He has reached the far end of the beach.

He continues his exploration by the rocks when a noise makes him jump. It's a seal sitting on a rock below. The animal dives. The man starts walking again.

He enters some thick bushes and walks among the close branches of a forest of bamboo trees. A bird flies away as he goes past. The man sees some water caught in some leaves on the ground and kneels down to drink it.

Then, again, he is alerted by a noise, a presence. He picks up a branch to use as a weapon. But it's just the rain. A sudden downpour.

The Red Turtle

The man carries on walking among the bamboo trees. He climbs a hill which takes him to the highest point of the island. It's a hillock, an overhanging rock from where he can see both sides of the island.

The island isn't very big. It's welcoming with its luxuriant vegetation, but it seems deserted. No sign anywhere of any human presence. The man calls out from the top of the hillock, but there's no reply.

The man has started walking the other way, among the bamboo trees. There's a gap a bit further on. A clearing? The man goes over to it. It's a waterhole, a little pond, hemmed in by vegetation. Fresh water.

The man dives in and drinks, the water up to his ears. Just then, he sees something: a tree, fruit, a breadfruit tree. He climbs up the tree, knocks some fruit down, and eats his fill.

Through the tall foliage, three birds fly past in the clouds.

Fade to black.

I.2. The island and its dangers. The desire to leave.

Another day.

The man climbs over some rocks to explore the other side of the island. He jumps in midair between two rocks.

He has reached the far end of the island and looks around him. There is a barrel in the sea below, the remains of a shipwreck.

He turns back to go down to *terra firma*, but his foot slips. He slides along the rock, trying in vain to stop himself, and falls from a dizzy height. He lands in a waterhole between two steep rocks. Impossible to climb back up. The rock is too smooth, and the incline is too sheer.

The man tries his luck by the sea.

He plunges under the water and soon discovers that there is no way through there either: an almost horizontal rock seems to block his way between the two rocks.

He goes back to the surface and looks around for another way-out, but to no avail.

He goes back under the water and risks his all. He dives into the tight passageway between the rocks. The gully is narrow and it looks like the

The Red Turtle

man might get stuck, unable to get past the obstacle or to get back. He'll soon run out of oxygen...

But the man's hand appears on the other side, then his whole body. The man races to the surface and hoists himself up onto a flat rock. Safe and sound.

Birds fly past in the sky.

The man swims behind the barrel. He picks it up and brings it back to the beach, but the barrel smashes into a thousand pieces. The man is vexed. As he looks at the horizon, another idea comes into his head.

He heads into the forest, starts to pick up bamboo sticks and brings them back to the beach. Night falls. The man lies down on the sand. It's been a long day.

A tiny turtle appears on the sand. The man picks it up, looks at it closely, then puts it down again. The baby turtle scurries toward the sea. Just then, another and another, then soon myriad baby turtles hatch in the sand. They all rush toward the sea which sparkles in the moonlight.

It is an epic race. The sea is nearby, but they still have to reach it, and the babies are tiny. The man watches their race until the last baby turtle disappears into the waves.

He remains alone, facing the endless ocean. How he too would love to leave.

The man, who had fallen asleep on the beach, wakes up in the middle of the night, as if gripped by a strange feeling. There's something on the water. He hurries over to it. It's a bridge. A huge bridge made of bamboo on piles which seems to stretch right across the ocean.

The man runs onto the bridge, dancing for joy. He races away.

When he wakes up on the beach, the sea is dead calm, a vast, glassy expanse of water.

It was just a dream. The man peers at the horizon, then lies down again, sad and alone.

Fade to black

I.3. First attempts to leave on a raft. Foiled by an unknown force.

Day breaks over the island.

On the sand, a crab catches sight of a baby turtle which died just before it reached the water's edge. The crab brings it back to its hole.

The man is further away, finishing building his raft.
All that's left now is to launch it.

But the raft is too far from the shore. The man pushes and pulls, to no avail.
In the end, he lays out a series of bamboos perpendicular to the raft to roll it over them.

Crabs scuttle among the bamboos.

The man is sitting high up on the beach.
He eats some fruit from the breadfruit tree.
A colony of crabs goes over to him, eager for food.
The man holds out a piece of fruit to the first crab which comes begging.

The crab grabs it and scurries off, the other crabs in tow.
The man watches them disappear over the top of the hill, then go past him, coming the other way.

Later.

As the crabs look on, the man gets ready to leave.
He pushes the raft to the coral reef, then hauls himself onboard.

He is still very near the island when he is alerted by a noise.
The man looks up. Just then, something hits the flimsy boat. It seems to come from under the water.
The man looks over the side. But already a second blow, much harder than the first, shatters the raft. The man falls into the water. He dives, looks around, but can't see anything.

The Red Turtle

He comes back up to the surface and goes back to the island.

Four crabs have come out of their holes and are looking at the sea, no doubt at the returning man.

Suddenly, they scuttle back to their holes. But there are only three holes for four crabs.

The first three to arrive take possession of the three holes.

The fourth runs flat out from one occupied hole to another.

In the end, it dives into the sand, just before the man's foot lands on it.

The man exits the frame; the four crabs reappear.

The man goes back to the top of the beach.

He yells out, furious at the unknown force which stopped him leaving.

Then he disappears again into the bamboos, determined to go back to work without delay.

He is picking up a bamboo when he hears something on the beach. Or rather he is alerted by a sudden absence of sound. As if nature had suddenly fallen silent.

He hurries over there, but he can't see anything disturbing the usual calm of the place. The crabs are looking at the sea. The man goes over to the shore. Could there be a slight movement in the water?

The man has gone back to work.

He puts a number of bamboos on the beach to build another raft.

The building work progresses well.

He soon goes back to the water, goes past the coral reef again, and heads out to the open sea. This time, he should make it.

And yet, he hears something again.

He sticks his head under the water, on the look-out. He looks closely. Nothing.

Time seems frozen for a moment.

Just when the danger seems to have passed, the raft is struck. The thing seems to be coming from under the water, a sort of invisible sea monster. The raft explodes. The man sinks.

The man emerges amid the remains of the shattered raft.

He manages to swim to the coral reef and pauses to catch his breath. He coughs. He's not feeling great.

Birds fly past in the sky.

I.4. Fever and Despair. The animals.

The man returns to the island, spitting copiously.

His last escape attempt exhausted him. He is alone, desperate, and injured.

The wind is picking up, bending the trees and sending sand and leaves flying on the beach.

The man lies down on the sand and curls up.

Later.

Birds fly past in the sky.

The wind has died down.

The man is lying on his back in the shade of the bamboos. He seems incapable of movement. Exhausted and absent, he looks at the sky through the foliage.

The sun sets above the sea, on the horizon.

Later.

An enormous centipede crawls over the dead leaves and the man's motionless foot. He doesn't react. He seems to be in a sort of feverish coma.

For those who inhabit the island, life carries on in a strange fusion with the sick, absent man.

Eat or be eaten, kill or be killed – that's nature's way.

At the water's edge, two crabs fight over a dead fish.

Further away, a spider waits for a fly to get caught in its web.

Ants come and go on the man's motionless arm.

He is lying on his belly in the bamboo forest.

Night falls.

Bats fly over the landscape in the already dark twilight sky.

A bat flies around in circles above the foliage. Its spread wings stand out clearly, black shadows against the dark grey sky.

It's nighttime.

Behind the bushes and the bamboos which line the beach, eyes appear. There's no way of knowing who they belong to.

The Red Turtle

They look closely at the man. Waiting for his death? To eat him too?

We come closer. The round, unblinking, vaguely threatening eyes are still staring.

In the sky, clouds pass in front of the almost full moon.

Suddenly, almost heavenly music can be heard.

The man opens one eye. He hears it and starts listening to it.

He struggles to his feet and heads for the music on the beach.

Musicians are sitting there by the water's edge.

The man runs over to them. They are a string quartet wearing tuxedos.

As he reaches the quartet, they disappear.

The man turns around. No, they're elsewhere, their feet in the water.

He runs over to them. The musicians disappear.

It was only a dream, a dismal mirage.

The man goes back onto the beach.

He cries and wails, alone and abandoned.

Fade to black.

I.5. 3rd attempt with the raft. Appearance of the turtle.

Another day has dawned on the island.

The man appears on his knees, exhausted, among the bushes which line the pond.

He plunges his head in the water to drink and clear his head.

Still convalescing, he walks through the bamboos, then remains sitting for a long while in the water, leaning against a rock.

Later.

He has started to build another raft when he happens upon a dead seal near the rocks.

He skins the animal, washes it with plenty of water, and dries it in the sun.

At nightfall, he makes a jacket or trousers out of it.

The Red Turtle

Another day.

A crab scuttles among the sticks of bamboo on the new raft.

The man casts off and climbs onto the boat.

The crabs are onboard, determined to leave with him.

The man drives them away. The crabs turn back to the beach and watch the raft departing.

On the raft, the man is on the look-out.

The boat moves along slowly as there isn't much wind.

Then, again the danger appears.

And for the first time, the man sees it.

It's an enormous red turtle which seems to want his raft to sink every time.

The man readies his weapon, trying to get the upper hand in the fight, but to no avail.

Once again, the monstrous turtle comes up from the depths and shatters the raft.

The man falls into the water and sinks straight to the bottom.

When he is under the water, the monster swims up to him, scaring him.

After sinking the man's raft, will it try to kill him?

The man curls up and heads for the depths. But the enormous turtle keeps coming closer.

The man hides his face. Through his fingers, he can see the turtle's enormous head and round eyes staring at him.

Then, suddenly, for no apparent reason, the turtle swims away.

The man comes back to the surface, gasping for breath.

He's had the fright of his life.

Part II. The man and the woman-turtle.

II. 1. Murder of the turtle and bitter regrets.

The man returns to the island, beside himself with rage. Fear has given way to anger.

He throws a rock into the water and shakes a bamboo furiously.

He is yelling his rage at the hillside when he sees it again. The turtle is on the beach, on his territory.

The man races down. He comes out of a copse, armed with a bamboo, runs over to the turtle, and hits it with all his strength. The stick breaks with the force of the blow. The seagulls overhead caw at the violence of his act.

He lifts up the turtle's shell, braces himself and, with his anger giving him the strength of ten, manages to turn it onto its back.

But that's still not enough for him. Now he jumps on its belly like a child having a tantrum, then throws sand into its face before striding away.

He dives into the sea and bathes for a long time, as if washing his hands of it, to forget his act or to regain his self-control.

Birds fly above the waves. The sun is at its zenith.

The man comes back from his swim. The crabs scuttle away as he goes past.

He walks around the turtle and carries on walking.

He starts building another raft, a few yards away from the turtle which is still on its back and looking a sorry sight.

...

It's the middle of the afternoon, the sun is beating down. The turtle's agony must be terrible, but the man doesn't want to think about it. He glances at it from afar, then goes fishing for his evening meal.

When he comes back from his swim at dusk, the crabs scurry away as he goes past: The man is dangerous.

And yet his anger has at last subsided.

He goes over to the turtle, touches its paw and its strange skin.

The Red Turtle

A few insects buzz around the animal. Its paw is no longer moving. Maybe it's at death's door. The man hesitates: Should he save it?

He goes and sits down nearby and holds his head in his hands.
The crabs seize this opportunity to pounce on his catch lying at his feet.

Then, all of a sudden, in the middle of the night, the turtle flies away.
The man runs behind it. He tries to stop it, but it climbs ever higher in the sky.

The man wakes up. It was just a dream.
He runs over to the turtle which is still lying motionless on its back, dying.
He kneels down next to it, touches its leg, and tries with all his strength to turn it over onto its belly, but to no avail.
It seems heavier than it was before, or maybe the man's strength has diminished.
The man sees the turtle's head lolling wretchedly.

He runs to fetch his bamboo container and sprinkles some seawater on its face. He does this several times, but the animal doesn't stir.

The man kneels down beside it, shattered.

Seen from above, the man and the turtle, very close to one another, form a strange hybrid creature.

II. 2. Half-woman, half-turtle. Care and attention.

The man and the turtle have fallen asleep on the sand, head to tail.
At the first light of dawn, a sinister cracking wakes the man.
He sits up and stares: the turtle's shell has split almost right across its belly.
It's a horrible sight.
The man turns to the sea, feeling numb and wretched. What do you do when you're so sad about a death you yourself caused?

Just then, it happens.
When the man looks at the turtle again, there's a woman's arm instead of the leg. And a woman's face and legs are sticking out of the shell. He instinctively recoils. The thing is just too supernatural. Is it another mirage?

But the woman is still there, her eyes closed, showing no reaction.

The Red Turtle

The man walks around her, peering at her. Is she alive?

He kneels down, touches her forehead, and brings his ear close to the woman's mouth. He can feel her breath on his cheek. She is breathing gently but regularly.

The man gets up to fetch some fresh water. As he goes past, he picks up the bamboo container, realizes that it's heavier than usual, throws onto the sand the two or three crabs that had sought refuge in it, and heads for the waterhole.

The crabs approach the half-woman half-turtle creature and look at her face which is turned to them.

The man gets some fresh water from the pond, then comes back to the woman.

He kneels down, puts an arm under her neck, and tries to give her a drink. But her mouth is closed. A trickle of fresh water runs down her chin. Her lips have barely even been moistened.

The sun appears behind the tall trees.
Soon the woman will be too hot.

The man picks up a few branches among the bamboos and brings them back to the beach. A crab runs after him to steal a twig.

The man hurriedly builds a little canopy that he covers with a branch. From above, he can see the woman's face through the foliage. He shifts slightly to get a better view of her.

Later.

The man has finished his canopy. A few branches are enough to give the woman's body some welcome shade.

Two crabs play around them, chasing after each other.
Two birds fly past in the sky.

It's evening.

The man kneels down near the woman's face.

He puts his hand on her forehead and dampens it with some water.

Now he sits cross-legged near the canopy.
He watches over her like a sentinel.

The Red Turtle

The woman seems to be in a deep, almost comatose sleep. Her face is calm and gentle as two flies buzz around above her.

Seen from above, the man keeps watch over her as he looks out to sea.

Fade to black

II. 3. The woman wakes up and disappears.

The island stirs to rain, in the grey early morning light.

Raindrops lands on the succulent leaves of the tropical plants. A lizard slides between the rocks to take shelter.

The man, who had fallen asleep near the canopy, is woken.

The woman is still there, motionless.

Raindrops drip through the canopy.

The man rearranges a half-fallen branch and goes to fetch others to protect her better.

But the rain is a godsend.

It drips everywhere like a life force. It creeps under the canopy, into the crack in the shell, onto the woman's lips, and onto her hand which moves at last...

When the man comes back, weighed down with branches, only the shell is still there.

The woman has disappeared.

The man runs to the shore. Has she gone back into the sea?

He walks along the water's edge, scouring the waves on the horizon.

The hard rain makes the sea inhospitable.

And suddenly, another idea comes into his head. The man changes direction.

He walks across part of the bamboo forest and goes to the waterhole.

The rain has stopped.

The man looks around.

In the sunlight, three frogs jump into the pond.

Yes, there are footsteps on the muddy path. The marks of bare feet. Hers, no doubt about it.

The Red Turtle

The man hurries over there. He follows the footprints which go through a thick bush which he goes through.

The man walks along, searching, scouring the ground. But in vain.
The footprints have disappeared.
The man carries on looking, without holding out too much hope.

On the beach, a wave ebbs at nightfall.
The man is sitting on the sand. He lies down.

The night is at an end.
The man wakes up. Did he hear something?
He looks around him...
That's when he sees her.

She's a bit further away, bathing, water up to her shoulders.
The man jumps to his feet in delight. He goes over to her.
But he frightens her. The woman bends down. Only her eyes are visible above the waterline.

The man stops short. He gestures at her to make her understand he won't hurt her. Then, she realizes she's naked. And modest.

He takes off his shirt, puts it on the sand, and walks discreetly away to the bamboos. He waits, listening closely.

When he comes back to the beach, the woman has gone again.
He goes over to the glassy sea, then turns on his heels.
He looks for her inland, more calmly this time, looking almost serene. He walks through the bamboo forest and climbs the mound.

He sits on the top, waiting.
Just then, he sees her on the beach below, just as he saw the turtle the first time.

She has put on his shirt and is pulling her shell over the sand to put it in the water.

She looks up and sees the man staring at her.
Time stands still as they exchange their first real glance.

II. 4. First tokens of love.

The man hurries down the slope. He's afraid he'll lose her again.

From the shore, he watches her enter the water, pushing her shell in front of her. The man is worried that she has decided to return to the sea for good, but no, the woman turns around, exchanges a glance with him, and carries on.

It's like a beautiful, moving, solemn ritual.

The woman goes past the coral reef, taking her shell as far as possible, then pushes it out to sea.

Now the young woman returns to the beach, far away from the man, avoiding him. She walks off toward the bamboo forest.

The man stands there, not really knowing what to do.

He looks at the horizon, then he sees the raft he's building. He hurries over to it. Yes, that's what he'll do: he'll put his raft to sea, too. As a token of his love and of their equal status.

He pushes the raft, but suddenly he hesitates, he stops what he's doing, and he stands back...

Then, with a determined gesture, he goes back to putting the raft in the water.

From afar, hiding behind the line of bamboos, the woman watches him. Her eyes shine exactly like those of the creature which watched the man in his sleep.

She sees the man go past the coral reef and push his raft out to sea.

Is that the flicker of a smile on the woman's face?

The man floats on his back, like a human raft.

Night has fallen. He sees the canopy of heaven above him and an intense feeling of joy washes over him. He slides under the water and swims in acrobatic movements.

Just then, the woman joins him underwater.

She comes close to the man, changes direction, and turns around him happily.

The man looks at her, equally delighted, even though he doesn't dare to go too close to her.

The Red Turtle

The woman goes back up to the surface. She waits for him, then carries on swimming.

The man and the woman go back to the island in the moonlight.

The man and the woman have reached the coral reef.

The woman stands on the surface above the water; she seems to know the place well. She is leaning over a rock, pulling off a mussel. The man looks at her in surprise. But his surprise is even greater when he sees the woman swiftly opening the mussel with an empty shell found on the ground, then gulping it raw.

The young woman looks up at him and hands him out an open mussel. She smiles. The man hesitates for a moment. He accepts the mussel and eats it as the woman looks at him. She keeps on opening mussels. The man is fascinated by the young woman.

Suddenly, he's overwhelmed by a thought. He turns away, and in a mute flash back, he sees again the moment when he violently hit the turtle with a bamboo. This horrible gesture awakes a strong shame in him. He raises his head towards the woman. He feels sad and hides his face in his hands.

The woman looks at him for a moment, motionless; then, slowly, she pulls the man's hands away from his face. She delicately touches his forehead and draws his profile with her finger: the forehead, the nose and the lips. As if she wanted to show her tenderness and discover his face in a single gesture.

The woman slowly takes her hand away; she stands up and enters into the water of the lagoon, heading to the beach. The man is surprised. He also stands up and follows her.

The couple walks in a field by the pond, a field of high grass bathed by the light of the moon. Crickets are quietly singing and the air doesn't move. The woman stops and turns back to the man. He comes close to her. They hug...

II. 5. They fly.

Music.

The man and the woman fly in the air. Looking at each other. We don't really know anymore if we're above or below them, in the air or in the water.

The Red Turtle

Their bodies come closer, in an irresistible physical attraction.

Lap dissolve

Birds fly past in the sky.

Lap dissolve

Some wonderful landscapes of the island. Birds flying.

Part III. The Child.

III. 1. Childhood.

Ebb and flow of a wave on the beach.

A little crab appears, coming out of its hole in the sand.

A child comes up. He is a few months old, maybe nine or ten months, less than a year old.

He walks on all fours, but moves fast.

He notices the crab which is scurrying to its hole for shelter.

The child follows it, rummages in the hole with its hand, pulls out the crab and puts it in his mouth.

That's no way to go about it. The crab pinches him, or wriggles in his mouth. The taste is unpleasant, and the child spits the crab onto the sand. Then carries on going.

A seagull dives down on the half-dead little crab and carries it off.

One or two years later.

The child is two or three years old.

He is sitting astride his father's shoulders.

The family is all together: the mother, the father, and the son. They are walking together along the shore, by the water's edge.

...

They have stopped in the middle of the beach.

The man and the woman are sitting on the sand, making or mending a net. The child is nearby, playing with the sand.

Then, his attention is caught by something near the sea and he runs off. When the mother realizes he has gone, she gets up and looks for him.

The child is further away, by the water's edge. Something is of great interest to him, an object washed up by the tide. It's a bottle.

The Red Turtle

The child tries to grab it when a wave washes over his feet and drives him away.

The wave ebbs. The child comes back. He picks up the bottle (it's empty; there's no message in it) and runs off so he doesn't get soaked by the next wave.

The child goes back to his parents to show them his spoils. It's a strange object when you've never seen glass or a bottle before.

The mother shows him how to take the top off. The child plays with it. Taking it off and putting it back on again. It's fun.

Then he turns to his father, giving him an inquiring look. He seems to be asking him where this object came from and what it's doing there.

The father stands up and starts to draw on the wet sand. First, their island, which is easy to recognize by its shape and its inhabitants: three figures, two big, one small. Then, further away, a much bigger land, more inhabitants, unknown animals (a horse, an elephant, etc.).

The mother comes over. She draws too, but between the two lands: the sea and its fish.

The child goes from one to the other, looking closely at each drawing, each place. He can't seem to believe it.

...

A little later.

Seen from a child's point of view, the waves seem much bigger. The child paddles in the water, uttering little screams. He pulls in his stomach against the waves, tiny though they are. It's the first time he's dared to venture into the water.

His father and his mother holding his hand are on either side.

The three of them stop when the water reaches the child's waist. They look at the horizon and at the great unknown that the child now finds desirable.

One or two years later.

Seagulls fly over the rocks which make up one of the two ends of the island.

The mother is there, leaning over a crevice in the rock. There's a wild plant she's trying to pick.

She is joined by the father and the child (who is now about four or five years old).

The father hands a basket to his wife who puts the plant in it while the child walks off to the edge of rock.

He looks at the horizon, then at the sea below: a turtle is floating on the water. The child points it out to his parents in delight.

He sits on the rock to get a longer look at it when some seagulls fly past, cawing, and cause him to lose his balance.

The child slips...

Then falls down the cliff.

He finds himself in the waterhole, between two steep rock faces, where his father had fallen a few years before.

The parents are horrified. The father is about to slide down after him, but the mother stops him.

The child sinks, then recovers and swims underwater, exploring the crevice.

When he resurfaces, his mother gestures at him from the top of the cliff to turn back: he should be able to get through the underwater gully.

The child takes a deep breath, then dives down to the depths.

It goes pretty well. He enters the gully, like he's being born again, then emerges on the other side of the rocks.

He is swimming up to the surface when he sees the turtle which is now underwater, too.

The child hurries back up. Did the animal frighten him?

No, he just catches his breath, then goes back underwater.

The Red Turtle

He approaches the turtle. He tries to swim around it, but the animal does likewise. They turn slowly around, not taking their eyes off each other. Like a silent face-to-face in which they discover and get to know one another.

The father is hurrying down the rocky slope when the child's head reappears above the waves.

He dives to join him and hugs him, watched by the mother who has now reached the flat rock at the foot of the cliff.

...

Later.

It's evening or late afternoon.

The mother is sitting at the top of the beach.

The child has fallen asleep in her arms, worn out by the excitement of his day.

The young woman looks at the sea serenely. Then suddenly, she sees something. She looks, a vague smile on her face. Maybe she even stands up, her child in her arms, to have a closer look.

Two turtles go past in the distance. We see the tops of their backs and their heads above the waterline.

Much further away, the moon looks like it is floating on the horizon.

Fade to black

III. 2. Adolescence.

A flock of birds fly in front of the clouds.

They go past the big breadfruit tree up which the boy has climbed. He is now 12 or 13. He is hanging from a branch, as agile as a monkey, and drops a fruit to his father at the foot of the tree who catches it.

The fruit is heavy. The father puts it down beside him.

But already another fruit falls on him unannounced.

The father jumps back. It nearly hit him on the head.

The father shouts at his son to be careful.

The Red Turtle

The boy was so involved in what he was doing that he hadn't seen the danger. When he realizes what happened, he pulls a funny face: half-concerned, half-laughing.

A little later.

The father and son come back through the fields, weighed down with fruit. Suddenly, the son rubs his father's head. It was quite unexpected. The father retaliates.

They put down the biggest fruit and start to run after each other.

They fall down, play-fight, throwing a fruit or two at each other and laughing their heads off.

Rapid fade to black

One or two years later.

A general view of the part of the island where the rocks rise up at the base of the crevice. A tiny figure jumps from rock to rock.

We move in closer. It's the boy, he's now about 14.

He runs along, without looking at his feet, in a feeling of total freedom, as if he knew every stone, every crack in the rock, every slope on this side of the island.

When he reaches the edge of the cliff, he runs and jumps, diving into the sea.

It's a perfect, virtuoso dive. The young man's head emerges out of the water, then he swims off rapidly toward the open sea.

Under the water.

The boy swims just below the surface, above a patch of underwater seaweed.

He approaches it, brushing against the seaweed with his stomach. It's a pleasant sensation. The child laughs. Everything is moving and sparkling as the sun filters through the water and the underwater currents make the patch of seaweed sway like a wheat field.

The boy swims closer to the seabed. He picks a little bit of seaweed and eats it contentedly.

...

The Red Turtle

The young man's head shoots out of the water.
He catches his breath, then glances behind him to get his bearings. The island is in the background, but a long way away. We may have never seen it from so far away.
The boy dives in again and swims even further out.

...

Under the water.
He sees an octopus, its tentacles flailing, swimming in front of him.
He has fun chasing it. The octopus speeds up. The race doesn't appeal to it.

The child swims ever deeper after the animal. (The further we get from the island, the greater the underwater depths become.)
The sand appears. A few coral reefs and starfish.
In the end, the octopus manages to slide its whole body into a tiny hole thanks to the lack of a skeleton. It's an impressive sight.

The child approaches the hole to have a look, but already his attention is caught by something else. A gigantic shadow partly covers the underwater seascape.

The boy looks up. He catches sight of two turtles swimming on the surface toward the open sea.
The child swims up toward them as fast as he can.

...

On the surface.
The child swims between the two turtles. Further and further out.
He studies them in turn, delighted with their company, then follows them when they decide to dive.

...

Under the water.
Here, the seabed is too deep to be reached.
But that's not what interests him.
For soon the two turtles join a group of their fellow creatures. There are maybe ten or fifteen of them.
Babies and adults. Big ones and small ones.

The Red Turtle

The turtles swim lazily just below the surface, all different sizes and ages. He has never seen so many.

The boy comes back up to the surface for air, then dives again to join them.

...

Later in the day.

On the beach, the father is worried. Night is falling and the child still isn't back.

He peers at the horizon, but can't see him.

The father joins his wife a little higher up on the beach. He gestures expansively; he seems agitated, worried, feverish.

The mother is calmer. She looks out to sea, shading her eyes with one hand. Confident that the boy will be back. It's just a matter of time.

The father decides to go off in search of him. Anything rather than wait, not doing anything. He unties a little raft which they probably use for fishing and which is by the water's edge, and sets off. He has a long bamboo stick to make the flimsy boat move.

From the beach, the mother watches the father on his raft. He is going past the coral reef.

...

From the sea, the boy, who is swimming toward the island, sees his father in the distance and gestures to him joyfully.

The father's raft and the boy reach other. The father yells at his son. He grabs him and pulls him onto the raft. The boy looks a bit sheepish.

The raft returns to the beach.

The boy is sitting cross-legged at the front. He turns his back on his father who is maneuvering with his stick at the rear.

Rapid fade to black

A new day dawns on the island. It's a calm, carefree day.
Two birds fly together.

Elsewhere in the sky, a bat flies towards the island, towards us.

The Red Turtle

It's a male. He approaches a big tree from the branch of which a female bat is hanging upside down, legs in the air.

The male lands beside her. The female moves away a bit.

The male flies off. He hovers around the female, then lands much nearer her this time. The female doesn't move away.

They are almost touching, their heads upside down.

...

Another day.

In the field near the pond.

It has been raining, but it has stopped now.

A raindrop slides down a leaf and falls onto the wet grass.

We move in closer.

Two snails are on the ground, on bright green leaves which are still glistening with moisture. They are big snails, a bit like sea snails.

One of the snails sticks to the other's shell. A sort of trunk comes out of its body and inserts itself under the other's shell.

They mate.

Another day, or later on.

A mating ritual is conducted in the waters of the pond.

A male frog hops into the pond and joins a female frog.

She watched the male coming, but takes off as soon as he reaches her.

The male swims after her. The muscles of their back legs relax in almost synchronous movements.

Then suddenly, the female slows down.

The male turns, joins her, and presses tight against her.

They swim together, clinging to each other.

Another day. Or the same one.

The son is sitting by himself at the top of the beach.

It's the middle of the afternoon.

Two years have passed since his underwater excursion. He is now 16.

He is sculpting a piece of wood with a sharp stone. But he stops, daydreaming. He seems melancholy.

Further away, on the beach, two crabs chase each other.
Then they press themselves against one another.

Later. It's the end of the day.

The boy is still in the same place, more or less in the same position. Only the daylight has changed. He can't have moved for hours.

He picks up the bottle next to him, has a drink of water, then raises the bottle in front of his eyes. He has fun, making the horizon coincide with the water level in the bottle.

Fade to black

III. 3. The tsunami – The family separated.

It's an ordinary day.

The whole family is picking up shellfish off the coral reef. The son is now a young man, he's 18.

The atmosphere is strange, electric.
Birds whirl in the sky.

Kneeling by a rock, the boy watches them, shading his eyes with one hand. Then he stands up, puts the shellfish he's picked up in their basket, grabs the almost empty bottle next to it and heads for the beach to fill it. He crosses the stretch of water which links the coral reef to the island, a little surprised to see that the water level seems to have gone down.

The mother, also kneeling down, watches him go away without giving it a second thought, then looks up at the sky. A flock of birds now fly past, cawing.

The boy has reached the beach.
He goes to the waterhole, also looking up at the birds as they fly past him.

The edge of the water has shifted.
It's very strange. It seems that it is ebbing very slowly toward the open sea.

Three or four crabs are there, on the wet sand.

The Red Turtle

They look at the sea, then they too move back slowly, or disappear into their holes. Once the birds have gone past, silence descends again. We hear more clearly than ever the tiny sounds of the crabs' legs on the sand.

The son strides along, heading for the pond, walking alongside the field which borders the bamboo forest. Suddenly, he stops and listens. We can't hear anything. The sound of the sea has grown fainter, giving way to a big lull, as if nature had fallen silent. The young man looks up at the sky, then carries on walking, perplexed.

On the coral reef, the father has stood up.

With hands on hips, he watches in surprise the stretch of water by the beach, the level of which has gone down again. The mother, who is still kneeling and hard at work, stands up to join him as the father walks a few paces to get a better view.

There are only a few inches of water left. The fish are almost high and dry. The father snatches one.

The mother who has stayed on the coral reef watches him, then looks up at the sky. We hear a sort of rumbling, like a continuous but very distant bass. A storm somewhere far away? But the sky is clear.

Now the woman turns to the sea. She looks at the horizon, her face worried, perplexed, watchful. The horizon doesn't look quite normal. There is a darker grey line between the sky and the sea.

The son is now near the pond. He plunges his bottle in the water, pricking up his ears as he fills it. Something is wrong. A distant, incomprehensible sound, like a rumbling which keeps getting louder. It seems to be coming from the beach, from the sea.

The young man turns to the path he came from. The noise keeps growing, the rumbling is getting closer. The sound slowly gets louder as he puts his bottle near the pond, then he starts running to the beach as fast as he can.

The mother's face looks terror-stricken.

It's a wave, a tsunami.

The wave is there on the horizon, distant yet close. Still distant yet far too close. When you can see it, it's already almost too late.

The woman runs as if possessed. She grabs the man by the arm as she goes past. He starts running too, though he doesn't really understand what the danger is.

They run on the wet sand, between puddles which are all that remains of the stretch of water which linked the coral reef to the beach.

The Red Turtle

The father turns around. That's when he sees it. He stops for a moment, hypnotized by the wave's beauty despite the danger. It is very close now.

The woman joins her husband, pulling him along by the arm. They run from the ever-growing wave.

The son has taken the shortest route. He rushes through the bamboos.

The mother and father run, too. We can only see their legs and the reflection of their running in the shallow water covering the sand. They seem to be gaining ground. But just as they exit the frame, the wave comes hurtling after them. It's catching up, it's only a matter of seconds now.

The son has nearly reached the last few feet of the bamboo forest when he trips over a bamboo which is half-buried under the vegetation. He goes sprawling on the ground, then picks himself up hurriedly. He races to the beach, emerging from the curtain of bamboos. That's when he too sees it. The wave is there. Coming to the top of the beach, like a galloping monster. The son turns on his heels.

He runs among the bamboos, the wave close behind. One after the other, like a stack of cards, the foliage of the bamboos bends under the force of the blow.

The wave gets everywhere. It's here and there, destroying everything in its path.

The boy tries to hang onto a bamboo which is suddenly ripped out of the ground by the wave. The bamboo is carried away by the flood, and the boy along with it.

Now it's the turn of the pond and its surroundings to be invaded by the wave. The water level rises. The camera is almost submerged. But suddenly it stops. Almost abruptly.

It's a vast field of muddy water with torn-out bamboo sticks floating on the surface.

Then, with unexpected violence, it goes in the other direction. The wave ebbs.

The Red Turtle

It crosses the landscape from the pond and continues toward the sea.

And then it's over. It has gone.

There are dead animals here and there.

An enormous lifeless centipede floats just below the surface.

A crab on its belly.

Not a single bamboo is still standing.

They were all torn out of the ground and sliced up, rhizomes in the air.

A pile of bamboos has formed in the middle of nowhere. A crazy construction, a catastrophic stack, a giant's game of jackstraws.

The boy is there, buried under the bamboo sticks.

But alive.

He slips between the cracks, climbing out.

He emerges almost at the top of the mountain of bamboos.

And looks at the island's apocalyptic landscape which stretches out at his feet. Absolutely everything is ruined.

The boy goes down cautiously.

He crosses what must have been part of the bamboo forest and which is now a scene of desolation. He looks around for the slightest sign of a human presence.

He runs, stops, looks around, then carries on going to the beach.

He jumps over the hillock at the top of the beach and hurtles down the sandy slope.

He stops at the water's edge which has gone back to its old position, but is now so full of dead wood, bamboo, and plant debris of all sorts that the place is barely recognizable.

He looks around in horror.

He turns his head left and right. He scans the beach in search of his parents, but can't see anything resembling a body.

Like him, they must have been carried inland by the wave.

The young man carries on looking further inland.

The Red Turtle

He dodges the puddles, calling out, racing through the devastated landscape. No sign anywhere.

He climbs a first hillock and shouts out to his mother and father. But he doesn't get any reply.

He climbs higher. He runs up the hill and calls out again when he gets to the highest point on the island.
He looks around, but can't see anything.

But there's no question of giving up.
He goes down the hill and crosses other landscapes.
There! Is that indistinct mass in the middle of large puddles a body?
He hurries over. But no, it's just a rock sticking out.

The boy continues his journey. Where should he go now?
Again, he heads for the beach as if he couldn't stop returning to the place he last saw them.

It starts to rain. A fine rain that drenches you.

He goes down the sandy slope, then decides this time to cover the whole beach along the shore.

Over there, in a corner of the dune with the uprooted bamboos?
There's something there. A vague colored dot which could be an item of clothing.

He turns and heads over there.
Yes! It's his mother. She's lying huddled up.
He bends over her, scared.
But she's alive. Only her leg and her face are wounded.

She sits up vaguely. She's in shock, incredulous and confused. She glances behind her at the island, her island, which is just a field of ruins.

Her son takes her by the shoulders and turns her to face him.

Her son tries to pick her up, but she pushes him away: she can take care of herself but the son has to find his father as fast as possible.

The child goes away.

The Red Turtle

The woman struggles to stand up. She looks like her strength has run out.

Just then, the boy reappears. He takes her in his arms and hugs her.

And he sets off.

He has gone.

He crosses the stretch of water to the coral reef as best as he can, pushing aside all the debris.

He climbs onto it and looks at the ocean.

III. 4. The tsunami. The family reunited.

Then, he dives.

Three turtles accompany him, preceding him.

They all swim together on the surface.

It's still raining and there's a lot of debris.

The first turtle dives under the water. Then the other two, then the young man. They continue their journey just below the waterline.

Night falls on this strange procession which disappears almost at the horizon.

Later.

The boy has stopped in the middle of the ocean. The search is made more difficult by the darkness.

But he sees something. It's the last line of bamboo debris. Seemingly the final point of the ebbing waves. If his father is anywhere, he's there. He swims over to it.

He is in among the debris, alone in the middle of the ocean, at night, and even he who knows the sea and its pleasures and dangers so well feels a little lost and abandoned. What if he never finds his father?

He looks left and right, but can't see anything.

Finally, he dives again. He comes across the turtles, hangs onto one of them and comes out on the other side of the line. Even further out to sea.

The sun rises, just above the horizon.

The Red Turtle

The light is pearly, the sea is glassy. It looks like a scene from another world: limbo.

The child has fallen asleep, his head leaning on a turtle's shell which is just above the water.

He wakes up and looks at the sun and the horizon.
Over there is a tiny dot.

We move in closer. The father is there, his arm clutching a bamboo. Only his face is sticking out of the water. His eyes are closed and he seems to be asleep.
But maybe he's in a deeper sleep.

The man hears heavenly music in the middle of which a distant cry calls him. It's time. He sees the incandescent white light of the sky. He's dissolving into this whiteness.

But the cry becomes insistent. The man opens one eye.
He sees his son in the distance. Is it his son or a mirage?
He waves vaguely at him, which is a big mistake. He has let go of the bamboo. Nothing is holding him up anymore.

The image of his son above the water appears for a moment, then the sea floods the screen.
The man sinks like a stone.
He doesn't resist anymore. He doesn't have enough strength to.
Sinking, that's his destiny.

A turtle swims up under the water at full speed.
It slides under the man's body.
Another turtle appears, then another, then the boy.

Together, they take the man's body to the surface. They bring him near his bamboo and put him down. The man seems more dead than alive.
Yet he is alive.

Later.
On the coral reef, the mother is watching and waiting like a sentinel.

She sees them.
She jumps headlong into the water.
She hugs her husband tightly.

The Red Turtle

The island is devastated.
Three figures move slowly in the middle of what was the bamboo forest.

The son supports his father, helping him walk.
The mother looks sadly at the landscape around her, then takes hold of her husband's hand.

In the sky, the birds have returned.

Later.
It's the end of the day.

The son guts fish, humming softly to himself with his mouth shut.
The mother joins him. She sits down next to him and prepares the evening meal with him.

The father is lying down a few feet away from them.
He sits up.
He's exhausted, but he already seems to have recovered some of his strength.

The family has found refuge at the top of the island which wasn't affected by the wave.

All three of them are there. Together. Alive.

Fade to black

III. 5. After the tsunami.

In the following days or weeks, the family gets down to cleaning the island.
Things need rebuilding.

(These short sequences can be harmonized by some music which would prolong and accentuate the melody hummed by the son during the previous scene.)

The first scene takes place near the pond.
It's a day or two after the disaster.
It's very sunny once more.

The Red Turtle

The waterhole is almost completely overrun by debris of all kinds. You can barely see where it starts and ends.

The son is in the water, taking out the biggest branches.

The mother and father have a net which they use from time to time for fishing and which we saw them making on the beach the day the son found the bottle.

They are on either side of the stretch of water and skim the surface with the net to pick up as many leaves and debris as possible.

A few days or weeks later.

In the bamboo forest.

On one side of the path, the mother picks up sticks and rhizomes and makes neat piles. She seems to be using considerable energy.

On the other side, the father and son carry an enormous bundle of bamboo sticks as best they can. They take it to the beach, to the end of what was a vast bamboo forest and which is now a sort of open field, dotted with shoots a few inches high.

Birds fly past in the sky, above the island's landscape which has changed quite a lot since the catastrophe.

A few days later.

On the beach. It's the middle of the day.

There are two big fires burning, quite far from each other.

The father is in charge of the one further away, the son the nearer one. The mother comes and goes between the beach and the hill, bringing new debris to fuel the fires.

The father and son throw everything that can be burned on the fire: bamboo debris, rhizomes, dead leaves and branches from bushes. They don't really have any tools to get the fire going or to contain it. When necessary, they use bamboo sticks which they regularly wet in seawater.

The son goes over to his gigantic fire to throw on a new load of plant debris. He is dripping in sweat.

End of the music?

(or at the start of the next scene)

The Red Turtle

Later. Near the pond.

The vegetation all around still hasn't grown back, but the pond itself is looking in better shape.

The son is kneeling beside the water.

He cups some water in his hands and splashes it on his face.

Then, he goes closer and drinks out of his hands. That's when he sees something at the bottom of the water which has become more or less transparent again.

It sparkles brightly.

We move in closer.

The bottle is at the bottom of the pond, half-buried in the muddy earth, near an aquatic plant. Tiny tadpoles wriggle past.

The son's hand enters the water, grabs the bottle, and brings it up to the surface.

Rapid fade to black.

Another day.

On the beach, there is no sign of the big bonfires anymore.

It's late afternoon.

The son is sitting at the top of the beach, his bottle next to him. He lies down.

The son is woken by a distant rumbling.

He jumps to his feet and looks at the sea.

Yes, a wave is approaching. But it's not as high and is going more slowly than the one from the first tsunami.

The boy enters the water. He goes to meet the wave. Slowly. As if it were the only thing to do.

The wave seems almost motionless. Waiting.

But as soon as the boy enters it, it rises, like a long intake of breath.

It rises higher and higher. The boy is first lifted up by the wave, then soon, he is swallowed up by it.

The Red Turtle

He continues to rise up inside the water, then reappears almost at the top. Just then, the wave stops. It's perfectly motionless. There doesn't seem to be any danger.

From the top of the motionless wave, the boy peers at the beach: he sees his parents far below, looking tiny. He waves at them, and they respond almost joyfully.

Then the son turns and looks at the horizon.

When the boy wakes up, he realizes that it was of course just a dream. The sun has set.

The young man doesn't really know where he is or in what state of consciousness. What a strange dream!

He gets up and goes over to the shore. But everything is calm. The water caresses his bare feet.

The father's outline appears behind what remains of the curtain of bamboos. He was probably coming to see his son, but something in the young man's posture stops him. He stands in the shade of a bamboo and looks at his son from behind, staring at the horizon. Just like the mother, nearly twenty years before, watched the father casting his raft out to sea.

The son turns away and starts to walk slowly along the shore, staring vacantly, lost in thought.

The son has turned inland.

He walks slowly, calmly, as if it helps him think. He crosses the field of young bamboo shoots, looking up at the sky. The Milky Way looks beautiful this evening.

Further on.

The son has changed direction again.

Now he climbs onto some rocks, walking along the line of rocks which leads to the far end of the island. We recognize the place, of course. They are the rocks he dived from one day when he was a teenager, and the ones he fell from one morning when he was still a child.

He sits down, at the far end of the island, as if caught in the canopy of heaven.

He thinks as he contemplates the sky.

The Red Turtle

It is in this silent face-to-face with the stars that he finds the strength to make his decision.

His parents are lying near the place where they've sought refuge since the catastrophe, the one where they all prepared dinner.

They look up at the sound of footsteps.
First, the mother sits up, then the father.

They watch their child coming and sitting not far from them.
A pause.

The young man lowers his head. He looks both sad and determined.
The mother and father look at him, somewhat overcome. They understood that their son decided to leave.
The father turns to his wife.

The island, at night, surrounded by the sea, under the stars.

The dawn sky.
An albatross hovers in the first light of day.

It's daytime.
The son slips his bottle of fresh water into his bag and says goodbye to his parents. All three of them are on the beach.

The son hugs his mother, then his father.
Some crabs watch.

The son enters the water.
He reaches the coral reef where his three turtle friends are waiting for him.
He turns one last time to his parents to say goodbye, then dives into the water and joins the turtles.

Standing on the beach, the mother and father watch him go.

Seen from the sky, the child swims off, among the turtles.

A little later in the day. It's still broad daylight.

The parents are lying on the grass.
The father is on his back, the mother is curled up.
She cries silently, as if the tears won't stop.

The Red Turtle

The father comes and huddles up against her. He puts his arm around her. She squeezes the man's hand and shuts her eyes. Maybe she can manage to sleep now.

The big bamboos of the forest swing in the gentle sea breeze.

Fade to black

III. 6. Old age and death of the parents.

Another day. The lagoon seen from the sky. The woman and the man swim quietly, side by side, in the big transparent space.

Lap dissolve

The island in the middle of the ocean.

Lap dissolve

The father sits up on the hill. He looks much more older now: 60 years old maybe. He's dreaming, lost in his thoughts.

He sees something below. He looks: that is his wife coming back from her daily sea bath.

She's coming up to the beach, her eyes are wet, she's got water until her waist.

She is around 55, but she is perfectly fit. She's particularly beautiful as she's getting out of water. She sees him and sends him a lovely smile.

The man smiles in return.

Lap dissolve

Migrating birds fly past above the sea.

Seen from the top, it's a cloud of silent birds passing, as many points from an abstract composition.

Lap dissolve

The big field. The couple have a stroll in the high grass. The woman holds her man's arm.

Lap dissolve

The beach lightened by a sunset.

The man and the woman are around 80 and 75 years. They walk slowly along the seashore towards us.

The woman stops.

The man does one or two more steps, then he turns back to her, interrogatively.

The woman stretches out her two hands towards him as if to invite him to dance.

The man hesitates and eventually lets it go.

They dance a little waltz, just like it, for nothing, for fun, on the beach.

Lap dissolve

Night.

The old man is lying on his back, on the beach heights. The woman is asleep, not far from him.

He watches the starred sky.

He turns his head to the ocean.

His eyes close slowly.

The woman wakes up; she feels that something's changed. She sits next to the man and touches tenderly his motionless face.

She looks down. She is very sad.

The lagoon. The quiet moment just before dawn.

The woman is standing up in the lagoon; the still water reaches her waist.

She lets her down in the water until she's completely submerged.

Only her long floating hair is visible on the surface.

She stands up.

A moment later the woman sits next to the man's body. She watches the ocean. The sun rises.

She lies down on the sand, close to the man, and softly lies down her hand into the open hand of the man.

The Red Turtle

The hand of the man and the arm of the woman united turn into a turtle paw.

The woman is again a big red turtle.

The turtle turns slowly towards the sea.
It descends the beach.

When she reaches the edge, she lets herself slip into the water quietly and begins to swim towards the horizon.
During a few seconds, the top of the shell is still visible before getting down under the smooth surface.

The turtle disappeared into the ocean.

T H E E N D