

# 'Wood Job!'

## Rural misadventure in lumberjack comedy

BY [MARK SCHILLING](#)

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Shinobu Yaguchi has become a consistent hit maker by following a simple formula: generate laughs from the stumbles and mistakes of heroes learning a new job, art or sport. This formula usually results in audience cheers and tears when triumph finally arrives after many ups and downs. Examples include his 2001 box-office breakout "Waterboys" (high school boys try synchronized swimming) and the 2004 smash "Swing Girls" (high school girls form a swing band).

Yaguchi might not be the first to use this zero-to-hero formula, but he has perfected it. However, in "Happy Flight" (2008) — which played like a feature-length promotional film for the airline industry — he seemed to be on creative autopilot.

His latest, "Wood Job!" in which a soft-living city boy (Shota Sometani) becomes a hard-working apprentice lumberjack, is a return to comic form, with more laugh-out-loud gags than his films have produced in many years.

One inevitable comparison is "Kitsutsuki to Ame (The Woodsman and the Rain)," Shuichi Okita's 2012 comedy about a neophyte film director's life-changing encounter with a 60-year-old lumberjack played by an inspiringly spry Koji Yakusho. But while Okita's film isn't really about the work of being a lumberjack, Yaguchi's is like a crash course on the subject.

This high information-to-laughs ratio has long been a Yaguchi trademark, but in "Wood Job!" he goes beyond amusing factoids and displays a felt appreciation for a rural way of life that is underappreciated in today's always-wired, removed-from-nature society.

The hero, Yuki Hirano (Sometani), is the sort of slide-by student most teachers are happy to see the back of. But after he fails his college entrance exams and is dumped by his girlfriend, this new high school graduate decides to make a fresh start and join a one-year trainee program for forestry workers, aka lumberjacks. His motivation is less a love for the great outdoors than a pretty face on a recruiting pamphlet.

When Hirano arrives at his destination — a village so deep in the mountains that he loses his all-important smartphone connection — he quickly tries to make a U-turn, but one absurd circumstance leads to another, and he soon finds himself in *dasai* (uncool) work clothes and a hard hat, being schooled in the basics of lumberjacking.

One of his instructors, Yoki Iida (Hideaki Ito), not only rattles Hirano with his snarling wild-man act, but quickly makes him an object lesson in emergency first aid. This incident once again turns Hirano's thoughts to escape, but he ends up staying — or rather, is trapped by lack of transportation — and is assigned as Iida's live-in apprentice.

What keeps him going is not a new-found dedication to forestry — Iida is a harsh taskmaster and a fresh fount of humiliation and pain each day — but his infatuation with the aforementioned pamphlet cover girl (Masami Nagasawa), who turns out to be a teacher in the village. She, however, has little but scorn for our wimpy hero, sure that, like so many city-boy apprentices before him, he will eventually turn tail and run.

Often cast in disturbed or dissolute roles (his award-winning turn in Sion Sono's 3/11 drama "Himizu" is an example), Sometani excels as the chuckleheaded hero, while indirectly mocking his own bad-boy image.

Though he screws his face into a comic rictus of pain at every opportunity, Sometani also makes us believe in Hirano's growing admiration for the skills and work ethic of Iida and his rough-hewn workmates, despite the agonies they joyfully inflict on him as he edges toward competence at their unforgiving trade.

Ito, by contrast, is often cast in tough-guy roles, such as the steel-jawed hero of all those "Umezaru" Coast Guard diver films and, similar to his co-star, Ito pushes that image to a comic extreme, by not just bellowing a morning wake-up call at his hapless apprentice but knocking his pillow away with a soccer-style kick. His bearish character also has a warm side, however, which he shows in his interactions with his devoted wife (Naomi Nishida).

There's not a lot of subtlety in this oil-and-water pairing, but there is a knotty truth: Human beings, however wrapped in digital cotton wool, thrive on difficulty — especially when it comes with the heady smell of freshly cut wood.

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*For a chance to win one of five packs of "Wood Job!" bath salts, visit <http://jtimes.jp/film> (<https://form.japantimes.co.jp/giveaways/filmgiveaway.htm?film=wood-job>). Deadline: June 2.*

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 <b>Screening Schedule</b>	<a href="http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/wood-job-kamusari-nana-nichijo/">Wood Job!: Kamusari Nana Nichijo</a> ( <a href="http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/wood-job-kamusari-nana-nichijo/">http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/wood-job-kamusari-nana-nichijo/</a> )
 <b>Japanese title</b>	WOOD JOB! (ウツジョブ) ~神去なあなあ日常~
 <b>Rating</b>	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆
 <b>Runtime</b>	116min.
 <b>Language</b>	Japanese
 <b>Genre</b>	<a href="http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/genre/comedy-2/">Comedy</a> ( <a href="http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/genre/comedy-2/">http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/genre/comedy-2/</a> ), <a href="http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/genre/drama-2/">Drama</a> ( <a href="http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/genre/drama-2/">http://www.japantimes.co.jp/films/genre/drama-2/</a> )

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