



APRIL NEWSLETTER

Hello to all our members,

A quick word on terminology.

During supper after a recent screening, a fellow Society member (who shall remain nameless, as I don't want to hurt their feelings) expressed their and some of their associates' objection to my occasional use of the word "hate" and derived words in my reviews.

This Society member felt that "hate" was too strong a word to use for mere film analysis. By using "hate" to describe a film, this individual claimed I was trivialising the word, and associating a film with Hitler or the Christchurch mosque shooter.

While I respect this individual, I find this argument silly.

I certainly accept that "hate" can be used rather flippantly. I would object if you said you hated *2001: A Space Odyssey* (one of my favourite films) because it's long and obtuse.

But I believe "hate" operates on a gradient, and I am not trivialising the word when I use it occasionally in film criticism. Hate is a legitimate word for something that is morally repugnant or just exceedingly unpleasant or objectionable, and if some films can elicit these reactions, then the word "hate" is not unreasonable.

Looking back at my film reviews for the Mail over the past five years, I can hate the *Fifty Shades* franchise for its normalisation of emotional abuse, *Magic in the Moonlight* for its insulting portrayal of skeptics, *Pixels* (and much of Adam Sandler's recent filmography) for its smug fratboy humour and overwhelming lack of effort, most of the *Transformers* movies for their incomprehensible plots and action and their oversexualized portrayals of women, or *Ready Player One* for its jerk protagonist, lack of meaningful dramatic conflict and hordes of hollow pop-culture references.

I can hate these films and elements, while still recognising that Hitler or the Christchurch shooter are **far** worse.

I countered the Society member's objection to the word "hate" with whether it's acceptable to use the word "love" in film criticism. They said it was acceptable, which I consider a needless double-standard.

"Love" can conceivably be used just as flippantly as "hate", and if a wonderful film can justify the word "love", a despicable film can surely deserve the word "hate".

If you're interested, please drop me a line with the films you hate (or love), with a brief explanation on why.

REMINDER: MEMBERSHIP FEES:

Please renew your membership if you haven't already.

These are the membership fees for 2019:

Full:	\$70.00
Concession:	\$65.00
Youth (under 25):	\$35.00

If you haven't renewed your membership already, you can renew it at our April screenings (at both venues).

You can also renew your membership over the counter at the Healesville and Warburton halls before each month's screenings, with an additional \$2.50 surcharge.

DVD LIBRARIES, HEALESVILLE AND WARBURTON

In case you don't already know, we have decided upon a catalogue system for the DVD libraries at Healesville and Warburton.

The curators will bring a list of available films for members to order from, and the curator will bring the selected film for the member at the venue's next screening (the following month).

WARBURTON FILM FESTIVAL

June 14-16

We have prepared a diverse selection of compelling dramas from across the world, to be screened from June 14-16.

The Festival will also feature the Show Us Your Shorts short film competition. If the Warburton Film Festival is an institution and point of pride for the town, the Show Us Your Shorts contest is surely an institution within the Festival.

Warburton is a cozy rural town with several great restaurants and hotels, meaning that there are plenty of accommodation and sustenance options if you plan on staying in town for the whole Festival.

We hope to see you at the Festival.

SHOW US YOUR SHORTS COMPETITION

We would like to clarify an entry condition of the Show Us Your Shorts short film competition in the Warburton Film Festival.

We will only accept short films from Australian filmmakers (and preferably produced in Australia).

This has always been a condition of entry, as we want to showcase and reward the work of up-and-coming Australian filmmakers, but we had not made this condition adequately clear in some of the associated documentation.

STAR RATINGS AND REVIEW FOR *THE DEATH OF STALIN*



3.5 from Healesville

3.2 from Warburton's viewers

3.35 overall

Directed by masterful satirist Armando Iannucci (who also created the political comedy shows *The Thick Of It* and *Veep*), *The Death of Stalin* is a grim yet extremely funny dark comedy about power struggles in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death.

The Death of Stalin has an atmosphere of grim pantomime, and is driven by witty dialogue as the members of the Central Committee scramble for influence in the power

vacuum.

The film has steady pacing and strong suspense, and Iannucci uses absurd humour to cast the pettiness, backstabbing and ego of the Soviet government in sharper contrast.

Beria's (Simon Russell Beale) sadism is established from the beginning, as the leader of Stalin's NKVD secret police and a man who jokes about sexual assault with his subordinates. The film also clearly establishes Beria's adversarial relationship with Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi), the film's ostensible protagonist.

As Beria begins manipulating new Party leader Malenkov (Jeffrey Tambor) and stealing several of Khrushchev's reform ideas, Khrushchev begins gathering support to challenge this cunning, cruel man. When Beria reveals a compromising connection between Khrushchev and concert pianist Maria Yudina (Olga Kurylenko), whose family was killed by Stalin's regime, the effort to overthrow Beria becomes even more urgent.

Iannucci inserted so many funny, subtle character-building touches into the narrative.

These include how loyal Stalinist Molotov (Michael Palin) ties himself in logical knots to support Khrushchev's plan, and how during Stalin's autopsy, Beria (while still disturbed) is the only Party member who doesn't look away when Stalin's skull is opened. This further highlights Beria's steely, cold nature.

It's also hilarious how when the Central Committee departs from Stalin's *dacha* (rural second home), the members are so desperate to be seen leading the affair that none of them realise that Stalin's body **must leave first** in the motorcade.

Since Iannucci is probably best known for the political satire show *The Thick Of It*, which made Peter Capaldi famous before he was cast as the Twelfth Doctor in *Doctor Who*, I wish *The Death of Stalin* had a brief flashback in which Capaldi plays Leon Trotsky, who was a major figure in the 1917 Russian revolution and a bitter rival of Stalin. That casting would have been **perfect**.

The Death of Stalin is a tightly-paced, confronting yet hilarious work of pitch-black satire. It was one of my favourite films of 2018, and it's my favourite film of this year's program so far.

FRITZ'S POEM

The Death of Stalin

March 2019

In old Russia, farmers and workers toiled
For the rich and church that were totally spoiled.

Then came Lenin and Stalin and 'oh curse',
Instead of better, things got worse.

Stalin built the Gulag, ruled with an iron hand,
There was fear and oppression throughout the land.
When he died, Stalin left behind
A power struggle of the most vicious kind.

The film 'Death of Stalin' portrays that well,
Those 'would be' successors straight from Hell.

It shows the flows of this self-centred lot
But funny "ha-ha" I did find it – not.



F.R.

APRIL'S SCREENING

Still Life

2013 British comedy-drama Rated M 92 minutes (approx.)



Directed by Italian director Uberto Pasolini, *Still Life* is a poignant, sensitive film about John May (Eddie Marsan), a lonely council worker whose job involves finding the next of kin of deceased villagers who die with no wills. John plans to retire from this depressing line of work, but finds friendship and fulfilment as he works to close one final case.

WARBURTON SCREENING: Tuesday April 9

HEALESVILLE SCREENING: Tuesday April 16

MAY'S SCREENING

The Other Side of Hope

2017 Finnish comedy-drama Rated M 92 minutes (approx.)

WARBURTON SCREENING: Tuesday May 14

HEALESVILLE SCREENING: Tuesday May 21

ALTERNATIVE FILM SPOTLIGHT



Tears in the Rain

Fan film

Directed by Christopher Grant Harvey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfLVwXkLwhE&t=13s>

Fan films are an offshoot of fan fiction: unofficial media made by fans as an extension of and tribute to a franchise they love. Fan films are often just casual projects by eager fans – and some are embarrassingly poor – but fan films can be compelling, extremely polished works that rival or even surpass the quality of official media.

Tears in the Rain, directed by Christopher Grant Harvey, is a prequel fan film set in the world of Ridley Scott's iconic 1982 science fiction noir film *Blade Runner*. Despite consisting almost entirely of a conversation between two people, *Tears in the Rain* is a poignant and extremely tense short film that brilliantly subverts our expectations within the narrative.

This short film perfectly replicates the feel of *Blade Runner*, from the neon lighting and strident synthesised score to the punky retro-futuristic costumes, advertising-strewn cityscape and dark, noir-ish vibe. Sean Cameron Michael, who plays protagonist John Kampff, even looks like Harrison Ford.

Kampff confronts Andy Smith (Russel Savadier), a janitor eating noodles in a diner, and jabs him with an unknown device. A brilliant shot early in the film shows Kampff approaching the booth and leaning to inspect the janitor's pet budgerigar, which we soon learn is artificial; Kampff queries "Artificial?", and while his eye-line is pointing at the budgie, as indicated by previous shots, this shot very conspicuously has Andy's head in the foreground. This genius shot implies that Kampff is really asking if **Andy** is artificial.

In the world of the *Blade Runner* films, replicants are a race bioengineered slaves used for labour on off-world colonies. Replicants are banned on Earth and have a programmed four-year lifespan, and special police/bounty hunters known as blade runners are tasked with hunting down and "retiring" rogue replicants.

When Andy tries to excuse himself and leave, but finds himself unable to move his legs, a harrowing sequence ensues, bolstered by foreboding sound design, in which Kampff describes a deeply personal memory from Andy's childhood that only Andy would know. This suggests that Andy is a replicant given the real Andy Smith's memories, and thus believes he is human.

The short film becomes a gripping verbal battle, the tension amplified by Andy's body slowly shutting down and Kampff's palpable contempt. Andy desperately insists he is human and argues his right to live even if he isn't, while a bitter Kampff taunts Andy over his artificiality.

Based on the memory Kampff described, you believe Andy is a replicant, and therefore "not real", but Andy's fear and Kampff's gloating cruelty render this possible replicant deeply sympathetic. Even if artificial, Andy displays a self-awareness deserving of survival, and conveys a fear we all share: mortality.

But when Andy, just before dying, describes a childhood memory Kampff is unaware of, both Kampff and the viewer realise with shock and regret that Andy was indeed human.

This climactic revelation is bleakly gratifying, as it both crushes our assumptions about Andy and vindicates our sympathy for this doomed character.

The character of John Kampff is a reference to the Voight-Kampff test, an intricate test that studies emotional reactions to determine if someone is a replicant. *Tears in the Rain* implies that after unknowingly killing a real human, a remorseful Kampff devised this test to prevent the retirement of humans.

This is arguably a better, more creative expansion of *Blade Runner*'s lore than *Blade Runner 2049* from 2017; while I absolutely **loved** *Blade Runner 2049*, I do admit that this sequel drew too heavily on the plot and characters of the original *Blade Runner*, rather than telling its own unique story jumping off from the original.

Tears in the Rain is a prime example of how just compelling dialogue and intense atmosphere can generate gut-wrenching tension and set the stage for a brilliant twist, and it's a fantastic addition to the world of *Blade Runner*.