



SEPTEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER

Hello to all our members,

2020 is winding down with very promising results.

Victoria has finally reopened, and people are flocking to cafes, bars, restaurants and retail stores. We have yet to learn when cinemas will reopen, but the Premier will hopefully mention cinemas on November 8, when further easing of restrictions is expected.

Surprisingly, I can think of only three films that I really want to see in cinemas before next year: *Bill and Ted 3*, *Tenet* and *The New Mutants*.

Tenet looks to be an ingenious thriller combining James Bond influences with time travel. *Bill and Ted 3* looks like silly, uplifting fun with some well-observed drama. *The New Mutants* is reportedly the last dying gasp of Fox's X-Men film series, but I'll still give it a fair chance.

Dune and *No Time To Die* (the next Bond film) have been postponed to 2021, and it seems *Wonder Woman 1984* may be delayed for safety reasons as well.

The Yarra Ranges Film Society *Annual General Meeting* is on *November 10* over Zoom at 7 PM.

You should have all received the necessary documentation and directions for attending the meeting. If you haven't received this material, please let me know so that you are prepared for the meeting.

We welcome all members to attend, and we encourage you to join the committee. We especially need more Healesville members in the committee.

I'm not sure when the committee (current or new) will be announcing our policy for carrying 2020 memberships over into 2021, but I can assure you that paid members in 2020 will get their money's worth as we enter 2021.

It's Halloween today: a time for having fun with fear.

I've always loved Halloween. Back when I was in primary school, my family would decorate our home for annual Halloween-birthday parties, which were major social events in the school community. We celebrated my birthday on Halloween back then, as most of my friends were on vacation in January, which is when my actual birthday is. We dressed up in spooky costumes, played games, watched (age-appropriate) horror movies and enjoyed a banquet of gross-looking food.

Many Australians dismiss Halloween as a hollow American holiday, but Halloween actually has its origins in the Celtic harvest festival Samhain, with cultural influences from all across Europe.

Halloween is one of the only purely fun holidays in modern culture. If you've previously dismissed Halloween, I hope you welcome it into your life and have some macabre fun today.

At the very least, I hope you watch some great scary movies today.

Below are a few options.

Cheers.

Seth

VIVARIUM

I'm ready to declare *Vivarium*, a surreal psychological thriller directed and co-written by Lorcan Finnegan, as my favourite film of 2020, but with one significant caveat.

A house-hunting couple, Tom (Jesse Eisenberg) and Gemma (Imogen Poots) are trapped in Yonder, an endless, lonely realm of identical picture-perfect homes, and are forced to raise a strange creature in the shape of a boy.

Vivarium is a triumph of layered, eerie atmosphere.

As Tom and Gemma desperately try to escape Yonder, only to end up at Number 9 over and over again, the film generates a claustrophobic feel from infinity, as the uniform, inescapable nature of Yonder sets in.

The loneliness, uncertainty and lack of sensation in Yonder visibly weigh upon the couple, and Tom and Gemma are driven apart by their differing approaches to understanding or overcoming Yonder and the "boy"'s bizarre, exhausting presence.

The boy screeches when he doesn't get his way and demands constant attention, and is clearly not human, as he has a distorted voice and grows from a baby to the equivalent of a seven-year-old in less than a year. Even so, the film generates sympathy for him through Tom's contempt and moments of sweetness and vulnerability from the boy, while leading you to question whether he is innocent or malicious.

The film explores themes of obsession and emotional labour in a dark satire of family life: Tom starts digging a hole, whether to find a way out or simply for a situation he can control, leaving Gemma to care for and engage with the boy. Both Tom and Gemma are instructed by Yonder's unseen overseers to 'raise the child and be released', but Tom's singleminded need to dig places the sole parenting responsibility on Gemma, in a macabre reflection of the unequal parenting duties in many families.

The sheer isolation in Yonder is symbolic of the helplessness some parents feel, as they think they have no-one to turn to for support.

The film establishes a semblance of domestic routine for the couple, with meal-time, "work" (digging), brushing teeth, bed-time and occasional sex, but the narrative keeps you constantly on edge with unnerving details and stylistic touches, and the boy grows more sinister as he matures and his "parents" weaken.

Vivarium is a tightly-crafted, deeply-disturbing film with strong performances and extraordinary atmosphere.

I'm slightly reluctant to call *Vivarium* my film of 2020, however, due to the problematic characterisation of the boy.

The boy frequently mimics his parents and compulsively repeats certain sounds, is articulate but blunt, screams to get his way, and always wants to be around his parents but shows little ability or interest in interacting with them. These traits read to me as symptoms of autism; as someone with Asperger's syndrome, I saw traces of my very young self in the boy.

It does concern me that the portrayal of the boy may further stigmatise people (and especially children) with autism and related mental conditions.

However, *Vivarium* builds a mysterious but extremely vivid, self-contained world with clear surface themes. The film also draws an obvious parallel between the boy and the cuckoo bird, highlighting the boy's identity as invasive and alien.

Potentially-harmful subtext is always a valid discussion, but given *Vivarium's* well-defined world and allegory, including the boy's explicitly inhuman nature, I'm sure that Finnegan and co-writer Garret Shanley never intended to invoke negative autistic tropes in their film.

Vivarium is available on DVD and for rent and purchase on iTunes.

SPUTNIK

Sputnik is a riveting Russian sci-fi horror film by Egor Abramenko in his directorial debut.

In 1983, Soviet cosmonaut Konstantin (Pyotr Fyodorov) brings a deadly alien creature back to Earth inside his body, and psychiatrist Dr. Tatyana Klimova (Oksana Akinshina) is enlisted to study the creature and separate it from its host.

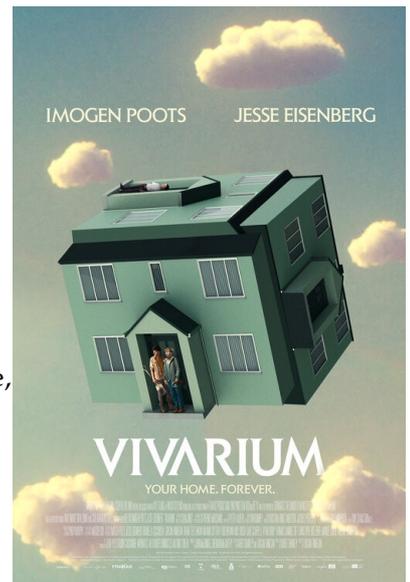
Sputnik draws heavy suspense not only from the fierce, unpredictable creature within Konstantin, but from the treacherous landscape of bureaucracy and deception he and Tatyana must navigate.

As Tatyana learns to interact with and calm the creature, the human characters grow more unsettling as their deeper motivations are revealed, and the plot cleverly links Konstantin's troubled past with his current plight.

The film has a subtle, eerie electronic score and stark cinematography. While the film frequently shows the creature and has several graphic moments, the terror is still left to the viewer's imagination when it really counts, which is the mark of truly effective horror.

Popular media often portrays aliens as either benevolent or antagonistic, with humans as the real monsters. Spielberg's *ET*, with its cute alien main character and callous, scary government agents, is the quintessential example, and the Weyland-Yutani Corporation is the broader antagonist within the *Alien* franchise. With *Sputnik*, it's rare to find a film that so confidently portrays sympathy and menace on both sides.

Sputnik is a tense, nuanced and character-driven sci-fi film in the style of *Alien*, *Arrival* and *Solaris*, and is available for rent and purchase on



iTunes and Amazon Prime.

096

096 is a chilling, well-paced horror short film directed by Klay Abele.

The film follows the escape of a monster from an impenetrable facility, told through a tense interview and a series of flashbacks.

096 is an adaptation of a short story in the SCP online collaborative horror fiction community. The SCP Foundation styles itself as a shadowy organisation that contains and studies paranormal entities and artefacts, and SCP stories are presented as official documents with detailed descriptions of containment measures.

The creature of the title (every SCP subject is given a numerical designation) has a terrifying presence within this short film. 096 is a tall, emaciated but seemingly invincible humanoid who hunts down and kills anyone who sees its face, and has an innate sense of when it is observed, even through video footage or a photograph.

096 is made all the scarier by the film's use of contrast: 096 stands motionless, weeping uncontrollably, when docile, but screams when enraged and charges unstoppably toward anyone who sees its face.

Despite the interview framing device, the film effectively explores 096's uncanny abilities through direct action, rather than exposition. As with *Sputnik*, *096* has a high death-count but leaves the monster's full brutality to the viewer's imagination. Through engaging, slightly stylised performances, the film provides an intriguing sense of the broader Foundation and its shady 05 Council leaders, and builds to a brilliant twist regarding protagonist Dr Daniels' (James Fitzgerald) motivations.

096 is an outstanding adaptation of a famous online horror story and an unnerving, cleverly-written film.

You can find the short film through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEOZkf4imaM>

