



Visions for the Future

Stalker

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Director: Andrei Tarkovsky
Production Company: Mosfilm
Production Supervisor:
Aleksandra Demidova
Production Manager: Larissa
Tarkovskaya
Production Group: T.
Aleksandrovskaya,
V. Vdovina, V. Mosenkov
Production Assistant: A. Agaronyan
Assistant Directors: M. Chugunova,
Evgeny Tsymbal
Screenplay/Original Story: Arkady
Strugatsky, Boris Strugatsky
Director of Photography:
Aleksandr Knyazhinsky
Lighting Supervisor: L. Kazmin
Assistant Lighting: T. Maslennikova
Camera Operators: N. Fudim,
Sergey Naugolnikh
Assistant Camera Operators:
G. Verkhovsky, Sergei Zaitsev
Editor: Lyudmila Feiginova
Assistant Editors: T. Alekseyeva,
V. Lobkova
Production Designer:
Andrei Tarkovsky
Sets: A. Merkulov
Artists: R. Safiullin,
Vladimir Fabrikov
Costumes: N. Fominoi
Make-up: V. Lvova
Music: Eduard Artemiev
Music Director: Emin Khachaturian
Music Supervisor: Raisa Lukina
Sound: V. Sharun
Cast:
Aleksandr Kaidanovsky (Stalker)
Anatoli Solonitsyn (writer)
Nikolai Grinko (scientist)
Alisa Freindlikh (Stalker's wife)
Natasha Abramova
(Stalker's daughter)
F. Yurna
E. Kostin
R. Rendi
USSR 1979©
161 mins



We are delighted to welcome Ian Christie to introduce this seminal film. After the screening there will be a short break before a discussion with special guests Evgeny Tsymbal, assistant director on the film, and Anatol Lieven, chair of international relations and terrorism studies at King's College.

Andrei Tarkovsky is probably the contemporary cinema's most persistent and thoroughgoing doubter. A doubter, that is, rather than a political dissenter. The scale of his films is never less than epic, the extent of his enquiry never less than cosmic, and the application of his psychology never less than universal – yet somehow his every speculation on the human condition seems to throw him back on a basic sense of inadequacy. It is not just the centre that will not hold in Tarkovsky, the whole system is riddled like a sieve – and it's always raining indoors. Looked at another way, the exploration of ideas – which is what his films always advertise themselves as – seems doomed to founder not just in subjectivity but in a peculiarly negative one, forever collapsing inwards, as if everything finally was unworthy, unknowable or an inevitable defeat.

Tarkovsky's reality problem is described with particular succinctness by the character of the Writer in *Stalker*: the world outside is all too well known, an imaginative concentration camp; the world within is a quagmire of secret desires which, if we could ever uncover them, might do us less justice than we think. The dramatic dilemma of *Stalker* is thus Tarkovsky in a nutshell. Three characters leave a world of uninhabitable desolation for the Zone, a region of uninhabitable mystery, at the centre of which is the Room, which has the power to make their innermost wishes come true, if they had the courage to believe that their real wishes were not the worst part of them. In this respect, *Stalker* is the most impressive of all Tarkovsky's films because its metaphorical construction is airtight, where the respectively philosophical and solipsistic structures of *Solaris* and *Mirror* weren't. Its three hapless characters stand for the life of the mind, the necessity of faith (the Stalker), art (the Writer) and science (the Professor), and their final failure is the death knell, the impossibility, of all three; the world they leave outside the Zone stands for the impossibility of everything else.

Stalker operates like a steel trap, where *Solaris* and *Mirror* seemed always to be leaving open escape hatches, for the director not least of all. Consequently, its political meaning would also appear to be uncharacteristically unambiguous: a police state holds absolute sway here, except for the inexplicable area of the Zone which, whether its origins be in outer space or some other (Western?) part of the continent, both represents and allows for the free play of the mind, completely undefined relations between man and his environment. In a sequence of early conversations, God, the Zone and the Bermuda Triangle are linked as a catch-all definition of the sense of mystery that the characters want to recapture – giving the 'miraculous' qualities of Tarkovsky's other films a quite specific political function. Tarkovsky is emerging, perhaps, from the hermeticism which has been the burden of the complaints against him in the Soviet Union until now into what one would think is a more dangerous form of political allegory. Except that as soon as the Zone is defined as the receptacle of everything that doesn't exist in the bleak, materialist here and now, attention shifts to the characters' inability to transform, transcend or even realise themselves once inside the Zone.

Since the actual landscape of the two territories is the same, the difference is a matter of ideas, of attitude, whose significance changes depending on where one stands: from the outside, the Zone is a concrete symbol of impossible hopes, of power and freedom; from the inside, it is an indefinable but frightening challenge to its intruders to realise their own potential for good or evil. Similarly, the political dimension of the drama might work two ways: is the Zone an indictment of the powers that be, either for their inability to accommodate the