



Zona: A Book about a Film about a Journey to a Room

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The spellbinding new book from the acclaimed author of *Jeff in Venice*, *Death in Varanasi* is a wide-ranging investigation into the masterpiece of cinema that has haunted him since he first saw it thirty years ago.

The putative subject of *Zona* is the film *Stalker*, by the great Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky. As Dyer immerses us more and more deeply in the movie, it becomes apparent that *Stalker*, for all its power to obsess him, is only the point of departure for a wonderfully digressive exploration of cinema in general and European cinema in particular; of how we try to understand what we cherish; and of how we try to fathom—and realize—our deepest wishes. Magnificently unpredictable, frequently hilarious (and, surely, one of the most unusual books ever written about cinema), *Zona* is thoroughly enthralling and thought-provoking from first to last—even if you have not seen the film.

Zona: A Book about a Film about a Journey to a Room Details

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From Reader Review Zona: A Book about a Film about a Journey to a Room for online ebook

Scott Gilbert says

The struggle of Dyer's writing (and perhaps his life) has been to find out what he really wants. His books are generally him viewing himself through the cognitive lens of other people's thoughts and art. This time the focusing device is Tarkovsky's film, *STALKER*, which Dyer ruminates, is all about finding out what one really wants, and the perils that lie within (and at the conclusion of) such a quest. One of Dyer's lightest writings, *ZONA* is just barely a book rather than an essay, due only to the sheer volume of personal illustrations and digressions he attaches to his main text. These textual turns upon himself, like the overarching task/quest mentioned previously make this also his most personal and seemingly cranky book (how he hates cigarettes! And burnt matches! OH!!), well in the literary tradition of those other UK cranks, V. S. Naipaul and Martin Amis. However, finding what he wants, what is worth wanting & hoping for, as well as the worth of hope are revealed in these grumpy, yet thoughtful details as they were to him in Tarkovsky's classic.

MJ Nicholls says

Only encountered Tarkovsky's *Stalker* earlier this year, and while not prostrate with admiration (the deliberate snail's pace caused my watching companion to doze off), the movie was captivating in a manner difficult to express, leading me to this magnificent précis, analysis, explication, and personal take from the conversational, erudite, impish, and serious novelist and essayist Geoff Dyer, who articulates the fascinating philosophical conundrums at the heart of the movie, while digressing in the hilarious manner of *Out of Sheer Rage* and other non-fiction works, offering up trivia and light scholarship to please casual and muso readers alike.

brian says

about 15 yrs ago, while working at kim's underground in nyc, i met the great russian poet yevgeny yevtushenko. at the time i knew him only as the screenwriter of *i am cuba* so we dished on cinema (i'm pretty sure my snotty little fauxpunk former self convinced him to rent *just one of the guys*) and he spoke for a bit about his friendship with andrei tarkovsky -- the highlight, of course, when he referred to tarkovsky as 'the saddest man i have ever met.' to put this statement in perspective, yevtushenko was running around the USSR when stalin was running the show. yikes.

only in my 20s did i have the stamina to watch stuff like *stalker*. and i really ate it up. i once sat through all 4 hrs of *the mother and the whore* at the guggenheim, took in all 14 hrs of *berlin alexanderplatz* in under 24 hrs, and practically camped out at the MOMA to watch hour after glorious goddamn hour of godard's *histoire du cinema*. now? shit, man. i'm lucky if i can muster the focus to make it through an hourlong episode of *breaking bad*. the irony, of course, is that i probably didn't have the life experience back then to fully 'get' those films, to have them truly impact my brain and heart in the way the filmmaker intended. but fuck intent: those films (as with most things we fall for in our 20s) are an integral part of who i am. bresson and bergman inform my outlook on life as much (more?) than the lessons taught by most 'real life'

encounters of my 20s. liv ullman's face as she steps on that shard of glass has as strong a hold on my heart as ginger's (a real life girlfriend) when she told me to get lost. the silence of *au hasard balthazar* as stirring as the muted sounds of the ramones while snorting lines in the bathroom of cherry tavern. that 'youth is wasted on the young' line sounds nice, but it's a load of cockshit: youth might mean not being able to recognize how great you have it, but the purity with which life -- and art -- can directly and unfilteredly punch your soul more than makes up for it.

Bill Fenton says

Every adult understands that a book has the potential to outshine a film on the same subject matter. For emotional and intellectual stimulation, my experience is that a book is almost invariably far superior to a film. What then about about a book about a film; written scene by scene? Such a book is "Zona", a slim tome (more on that later) about the great Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky's "Stalker", itself a film adaption of a book (undermentioned in Zona) "Roadside Picnic" by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky.

Stalker is in my top five films of all time, pipped only slightly for the top position by Tarkovsky's "Andrei Rublev" and stands acknowledged, virtually universally, as an exceptionally fine film. In Zona the author Geoff Dyer expresses an affection for Stalker that verges on (likeable) monomania. Using the convenient construct of taking us in detail through each scene in screen order, Dyer unfolds his love in a strangely non-linear manner. Strange, given that the book so slavishly follows the film. His admiring gushes early on for example clearly shade that which follow, making the film to seem somehow anticlimactically lesser as it unfolds. Strangely interruptive of this scene-by-scene explanation then are hugely distracting footnotes that on occasion extend to three pages in length. ("That's not a footnote, son, this, is a footnote!") His voice, otherwise attractively comradely in style, is at odds with footnote convention. With Dyer's collegiate and relaxed writing surely it would have been a simple matter to incorporate the comments contained in these footnotes into asides in the main text, separated only by paragraphs? Footnotes ideally are for attribution or expansion of individual discursive facts or points, and given the chatty tone of this book, amount here to an affectation.

Dyer's casual approach to the 'big question(s)' raised in Stalker leads him to some undergraduate moments. His regret, the regrets that he believes a "Room" of his own may conjure with, is that he has never had a sexual threesome. Further he details that such a threesome ought to have been he and two women and he laments two such opportunities he missed. I am all for irreverence, but the banality of this regret more than smacks of irrelevance.

Also irritating to a point of intruding into the reading process is the typographical conceit of ultra large leading. The gutters of white space between lines of type may pad out this slim book into something less substantial in the hand, but they constantly intrude into the comprehension processes. Deceitful production that helps drive readers to electronic books? Or away from reading altogether? Contrast this with the brilliant production values of the "Library of America" books, fighting to preserve printed literature in an electronic world.

So, is the book better than the film, or even equal to the film? No. Stalker, like the destination 'room' itself, has meanings and ideas that seem almost boundless, depending upon one's mental state at the time of viewing. Quantum movie-making; film altered by your personal observation. Zona attempts to pin down a singular explanation, for narrative purposes, if for no other, better, reason. Ultimately this creates interesting, but hardly essential reading. Rather one is left with a mildly favorable impression of the writerly cleverness

of a fellow Tarkovsky admirer. And what a cracking film *Stalker* is.

Mary says

I caved in and read it mostly because I finally got around to watching *Stalker*, which, inspiring immediate and total adulation, left me bereft, as Tarkovsky neophyte, that it was so soon over (when have 2 and half hours felt so short?), and like any mourner needed to immediately replay it over in my mind's eye, or chew the cud of it as it were. So I picked this up. Dyer's ok as a film companion, sometimes managing to be genuinely witty and enlightening about the film and other tidbits, but his chatter is mostly froth, and more often than not feels like a friend you take to the movies only to realize too late that he's "that guy," the grating audience member you want to smack on the face because he just won't shut up. But I guess I had that one coming.

Marc Weidenbaum says

Quick review. I may write more later.

I recommend this for anyone who's seen the movie *Stalker* (a science-fiction road trip by director Andrei Tarkovsky that's a modern classic of Russian film) and for anyone who wants a glimpse into the mind of a true cinephile.

By "true cinephile" I mean not an aficionado of film, but a habitué of the cinema as a physical place, someone for whom cinema-going is — and, more to the point, was — an essential part of the movie-consuming process.

The key thing that occurred to me as I read Dyer's book about this fairly infrequently viewed movie is that there's a clear and maudlin parallel between his concept of cinema and the facts of the world in which the film was made. Both were systems defined by a culture of significant deficits. The movie was released in 1979, during what we have come to understand as the waning years of Soviet communism, an economic engine that worked, when it did work, in fits and starts covered up by a veneer of bravado saber-rattling.

Dyer's depiction of his core film-going years is one in which his viewing was defined not by what he wanted to see — the case in our Netflix-friendly, Tivo-enriched, BitTorrent-supported era — but by what was available. I think his depiction of how limits shaped cultural consumption is on par with what Jonathan Lethem accomplished in his recent 33 1/3 book on Talking Heads' album *Fear of Music*. Lethem has a clear view of his past, but doesn't wallow in it. Dyer's evident nostalgia for that period is at times like that of Stalinists who miss standing in line for a loaf of bread — it is, more than anything, an act of willful disregard for modernity.

Dyer's relative distaste — his adoption of the robe and role of the old fogey — for the world in which he finds himself isn't just related to film. He evidences a professor emeritus' generational cluelessness, for example when he riffs about how the index finger has less of a privileged role in our post-rotary-phone age. Clearly this is an individual with limited experience on a touch-screen device. (At the risk of venturing into the sort of first-person aside that is very much Dyer's mode: I had a severe cut on my right index finger while I was reading a hardback copy Dyer's book. I found that using my touchpad on my laptop and the screens of

my phone, iPad, and iPod Touch to be an initially painful and, later, at best awkward experience, as band-aids impeded use, as did the wound's scab as it formed.)

Beyond that, *Zona* is a book about obsessions, both Dyer's for the film and Tarkovsky's for the process of filming. The book is frustrating, because it feels like it was written fairly quickly, and benefited from limited acts of revision. Still, the full range of associations that Dyer draws within the film's working parts and between the film and the world at large is phenomenal. The personal asides have gotten the book a good amount of negative attention, but I think of them as an expression of how much the movie — how much movie-going — bleeds into Dyer's sense of his own life. A lot of critiques of those personal asides neglect to note that they appear mostly as footnotes, not in the actual main body text of the book. Then again, those footnotes are often so long as to make it unclear on the page which one is reading: the main or the supporting text. At least in the hardcover book, there is no apparent distinction in how both are treated typographically. There is simply a thin line dividing them.

As I read the book, I came to think of that thin line as being not unlike the line in *Stalker* that divides the world from the Zone that is the initial destination of the title character and his traveling companions.

There are references to sound throughout — especially a certain “clang” that Dyer seems to feel is the movie's intrinsic soundmark. I was a bit anxious about their potential absence from the narrative in advance of reading the book, because after scouring many reviews before reading Dyer's actual text — taking a slow approach somewhat aligned with the film's own vision of a journey: reading various writings about this book about a film about a journey to a room before reading the book itself — I found little mention of sound. The score to *Stalker* is by Edward Artemiev, one of the most essential electronic musicians in Russian history (I interviewed his son, Artemiy Artemiev, who runs the label Electroshock, back in 2003: “Shock the Bear”), and the music is an essential part of the movie's structure and effect (I highly recommend listening to the track titled “Train”). It's quite likely that the “clang” that registers with Dyer is the railway noise that Artemiev folded into his richly layered, yet still often threadbare-ambient, score. I read Tatiana Yegorova's book *Edward Artemiev's Musical Universe* when it was first released, and I think I'm going to stalk it now for its *Stalker* material.

Peter Landau says

Geoff Dyer has an openness to experience that finds the truth in what I might discard as debris, until, of course, his discourse reveals that its detail is intrinsic to any understanding. Nothing is unexamined and, remarkably, the balls are all airborne -- the scholarly research, the history, the personal, the travelogue, the fantasies, the references -- none fall to the ground. It's a display of criticism as art, proof that the source can often be a springboard for a new art born from art. After reading the novel on which the film (and then watching that streaming free on YouTube!) on which Dyer's book is based I feel as if my toe has only teased the deep waters that he submerged himself in to write this unclassifiable tome.

His journey is no less magical than the one taken by the *Stalker* of the film and his two companions, the Writer and the Professor, and the one that we as viewer and now reader are on with Dyer, who has the almost supernatural power to anticipate our emotional state page by page, shocking me at least when at the beginning of the book's only section break he acknowledges that sense of relief in pausing, in the blank page or even a carriage return offers for the reader. How did he articulate something that I didn't even know I knew?

In all honesty, I had a hard time watching STALKER the film. It was slow (Dyer acknowledges that, too, of course) and at one point over the few days it took me to piece together the time to finish watching the film I dozed off only to wake and see the three main characters asleep themselves as if the novel, film and book were not separate expressions, but living and breathing moments in time, my time, forever repeating themselves. I felt as if the moment in which I'm alive now is no more real than the moment captured on film, on the page, in the past or in the future, it's all inescapable and existent simultaneously. It's that type of impossibility that made me sense the presence of the other in the novel, shown in the film and revealed in Dyer's marvelous account.

Cynthia says

Over the Rainbow

The premise of "Zona" is that there exists a Zone which houses a mystical room; a room where your deepest desire will manifest. That's the pared down version of Dyer's short book but "Zona" is the antithesis of pared. It's lush with references to movies and books. It also has philosophic and art and music highlights though not as numerous. No one has a real name. They have titles that refer to their functions. Stalker, Writer and Professor are the main protagonists. Ostensibly the book is an analysis of Tarkovsky's movie "Stalker" made in 1979. Many people feel it's the best movie ever. I haven't seen it so I can't say. My feeling is that Dyer only used the movie to hang his vast knowledge of the arts and his thoughts on life and the human condition in general. The movie is also a symbol, an understudy for whatever work of art has been a high point for individuals. That book or movie, often read or seen early in life, that slaps us awake. He talks of watching "stalker" over and over, obsessing on the bits and pieces in the background and foreground pondering their importance and finally deciding they mean nothing yet he can't help continuing to seek some meaning. Similarly all his cultural references could be seen as red herrings. That's not to say that the works don't have value. They do. In the end, however, each person has to decide for themselves what they value, who they choose to be and more importantly whether they let themselves have their heart's desire. Dyer's humor kept splashing out when I least expected it. I found myself chuckling quite often.

He details how the movie switches from black and white and back, the same technique used in "The Wizard of Oz"; to me, this reflects how our lives alternately go from high points to boredom and sometimes to woe. Dyer uses the cultural high points he's digested to mirror the emotional impact of life events. His best bits and some of the funniest were when his reflections on writing and writers. He has the ability and humility to laugh at himself. He's at his best in those passages. "Zona" takes a lot of concentration to read but it's well worth it.

Caleb says

Zona is a puzzling book - an engaging read with plenty of fun insights that ultimately felt shallow. Dyer's thick description of Andrei Tarkovsky's "Stalker" is at its best when it demonstrates the film's expressive possibilities. I enjoyed his speculations about character motives and symbolic meaning, as well as the few times he offered cinematic or historical context. The book drags when Dyer talks about himself. I wish I didn't know that he attends the "Burning Man" festival, which was one of a few personal details that either made me roll my eyes or question his reliability as an interpreter. Dyer also de-spiritualizes the work of a

deeply spiritual filmmaker, likely because he is incapable of grasping that aspect of Tarkovsky (again, I think of *Burning Man* and cringe). In the end, *Zona* will certainly enrich my next viewing of *Stalker*, but it fails to offer much comment or insight beyond the film (ironic, perhaps, because Tarkovsky laboured to make films that were life) and even fails the film in some crucial respects. A good read, but frustrating.

Mark Johnson says

Stalker is astounding to me, as are most of Tarkovsky's films. But reading this book is nearly the opposite experience of watching the film.

Stalker is a suspenseful, hypnotic experience. Tarkovsky sustains a rich feeling of beauty and simple profundity, inspiring confidence in the viewer that he will not let you fall or waste your time by negating the trust built up between you.

The suspense of this book, on the other hand, lies in dreading the next inane observation or mundane association from the author's personal life, most of which take the form of a running parallel text of footnotes, pretty much all of which should have been mercifully deleted.

Dyer claims to love the film, but seems to secretly resent its hold on him. He recounts the film scene by scene only to repeatedly drag it down to the snide, mediocre realm that he lives in. There are a few appreciative passages, the relative depth of which are mostly borrowed from the film itself, but they are quickly and consistently defaced with Dyer's smug, subjective digressions that are so embarrassingly puerile at times they nauseated me as much as the mean-spirited blog postings that inundate the Internet.

Dyer's conceit, of course, is that he is no better than one of the small-minded characters in the film. The book is his own personal journey to the Room, where, like Writer, he would be thrown back onto himself and forced to confront what a self-absorbed person he really is. The problem is that the film characters are embedded in a philosophical, cinematic world that perfectly balances their subjective pettiness. In Dyer's book, it's all him.

Stalker and Tarkovsky deserve better than this. A lot better.

Ben Loory says

very strange book, though not as strange as i'd like. it's basically dyer live-blogging the experience of watching andrei tarkovksy's 1979 film *stalker* (which is one of my favorite movies (or used to be, back when i actually watched movies and didn't just stare at the interworld all day)). as he walks you through the movie, he has lots of thoughts, both about the movie and tarkovsky and the making of the film, and about his (dyer's) own life as a fan of the movie (different times he's seen it, etc.) and otherwise. some of these thoughts are interesting (the stuff about the making of the film, mostly), and some are not quite as interesting (the stuff about how dyer wishes he'd had a threesome), but it all moves quickly and keeps your interest (i read the whole book in one sitting). strangely, the thing i liked best about the book was just being able to watch the movie again in my mind without actually watching it with my eyes, just by reading his description. it was like watching this weird ghost-version of the movie (which took a lot longer but somehow seemed much shorter than the real one). i guess i just wished there was a little more *to* the book; it was fun while it

lasted but didn't leave any big impression. it was *just* dyer's thoughts about the movie woven through a retelling of the movie... it wasn't, like, an autobiography in the form of such a book, or a stand-alone story of some kind, or an essay of greater scope... there was no other level to it all. but it was fine, i enjoyed it. definitely a book for anyone who likes tarkovsky. if such people even exist anymore.

James Murphy says

Zona by Geoff Dyer is a curious little book. Over thirty years ago Dyer first saw the film Stalker by the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky. Still fascinated by what he saw, he's written a book about the film which is a synopsis and interpretation of the narrative. But that's just the start point because it's more than just a movie to the author. There's layered meaning, if not in the story itself, in the rich cornucopia of allusion it pulled from Dyer the viewer. He uses its plot elements as referents to his own life and even illustrates how they can pertain to the lives of us all. Dyer gives himself up to whatever he's reminded of and reflects on it all in footnotes, some so long they become digressions. The longest of these runs for 7 pages. In this way the book becomes a meditation, on movies, particularly on Stalker and other films by Tarkovsky, and on how we reach the point at which we totally understand ourselves. He writes about how the older we get, for instance, the more we think about and yearn for the past. He makes a case for the close relationship between hope and belief. He questions whether or not the majority of us really want to understand the heart of what he calls our souls.

Stalker is a film relatively few of us have seen. I felt my understanding of the book was limited because I haven't seen it. Though Dyer's commentary is detailed and interesting, I felt I couldn't begin to appreciate what he so clearly loves because, not having seen the film, I have no visual accompaniment to his text. I think we've all seen something similar to it. A trio of men enter a Chernobyl-like Zone which appears to be restricted by some toxic hazard as well as government control. At its heart is the Room, and when our characters reach it Dyer suggests it may be an area where our most ardent wishes may be realized. That promise may be the key to Dyer's passion about the film. As the 3 men return from the Zone and sit over a beer, tired and dirty from exertion and tension, they seem to realize what they sought hadn't been found. More, what they'd learned turned out to be empty. And perhaps that's Dyer's point as well, that in the end it doesn't amount to much. You enter the Zone in a mild funk, uncertain, and you leave the Zone still wearing the uncertainty just like your sweaty clothes and waterlogged boots. But in the end if man's purpose and the meaning he creates is an empty chasm, at least the steady eloquence of Dyer's prose is the reliable guide into the Zone and back again.

Jeff Jackson says

Every blue moon, an artwork comes along that seems like it's aimed solely at you. Something so specific to your particular interests that it's difficult to imagine an audience for it larger than one. For me, that work is "I'm Not There," a movie about Bob Dylan minutiae that's structurally inspired by vintage Godard films. On the surface, "Zona" looked like another one of those works: A favorite writer devoting an entire book to my favorite film by the dauntingly arty Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky? How did this thing even get published?

Geoff Dyer turns out to be less obsessively hermetic about his subject - and less concerned with trying to embody its visionary essence - than Todd Haynes in "I'm Not There," which is maybe why the book felt like a slight letdown to me. But I suspect that's good news for 99% of readers, because Dyer's droll and chatty narrative aims to be entertaining even if you have no prior knowledge of the film. So many critics treat Tarkovsky's work like forbidding and sacred ikons of Great Cinema. This book's most significant achievement is making "Stalker" feel accessible and genuinely exciting without dumbing it down. The film is a deathless masterpiece, sure, but getting a clenched asshole trying to solemnly decode its mysteries is the exact wrong way to approach it.

Instead of going on about the many virtues and few flaws of this fine book, I recommend checking out J. Hoberman's review which eerily elucidates many of my own reactions - plus a few I didn't even know I had.

Owlseyes says

I haven't read the book;nevertheless, I started my preparation for reading it. See below, how.

I am indebted to Geoff Dyer, due to his recent first-visit to Portugal and the interview he gave to the newspaper Publico [31st of May 2013].In it he spoke about several things: the publication in Portuguese of Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It,its content....but also about Zona: a sort of "literary meditation". The interview triggered all that follows,in the present text.

Watching Tarkovsky's movie "Stalker" and the debate Geoff Dyer participated in New York*, made me write these notes/reflections on an important movie, not so much discussed as it deserves, I guess.

The "slow-film" was made in 1979.It ran the risk of almost not being made, just like Coppola's (Apocalypse now) and Hertzog's (Fitzcarraldo). Geoff saw it in 1981 and got "overwhelmed by its power".

The movie was shot in Estonia; there were three replacements of the photography director...and a heart attack. It was based on a 1971 short novel: Roadside picnic, by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky.

Geoff said that Stalker is a "tragic apostle" character, a believer in the Zone. When being made, someone criticized the way the film began...it should be sped up, but Tarkovsky got it even slower. It is known that T. was persecuted by the (soviet) system. But even in Mirror (another film by Tarkovsky) we can talk of a "West" market-censorship, Geoff commented.

The movie opens with a quotation from Nobel prize winner Wallace:"**What was it? a meteorite? a visit of inhabitants of the cosmic abyss? One way or another our small country has seen the birth of a miracle,the Zone**".

At Stalker's bedroom we watch: his wife still in bedwith daughter (Monkey). They got a mutant daughter, whose head is covered by a colored scarf,later on we will get to know, because part of the movie is ran on black-and-white. Color is a later "event".

One of the initial scenes takes place in sort of a gloomy/wet-floor bar where the three main characters (the Stalker, the Professor and the Writer) talk about several issues. The Writer talks about the world being "boring"... "there's no Bermuda triangle"...;the Zone being the "product of an advanced civilization".

Previously, the Stalker had been introduced to a lady who asked him: are you really a Stalker?, ...but she was dismissed by the Stalker: "go!".

The Professor is a physicist.

The Writer doesn't give a damn about inspiration. He wonders: "why do you need the Zone?". Stalker recalls a character (Porcupine): "he was my teacher, and opened my eyes".

The three get ready for the voyage to the Zone; they use a jeep...they try to evade police guards, patrolling the site; they manage to enter the place,though.

The Zone is a place **"where wishes come true"**; 20 years ago a "meteorite fell here", it was never found, but "people began disappearing".

In the Zone there's a ROOM they try to reach:... **which will give you "anything you want". As long it's your "innermost wishes: they'll will be made real here"**.

"We are home...it's the quietest place, because there's not a single soul".

Stalker had got a religious reverence for the Zone: it's meant to be "respected". And yet the Zone is a "very complicated system of deadly traps".

While travelling through a desolated area they stop for rest. Stalker falls asleep, and lying down on the grass listens to a voice: "The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind ...wrath of the Lamb". Revelation 6:12.

There are plenty of discussions between the three characters: for example about music: "it gets through our hearts", says someone.

While they're going through a tunnel Stalker recalls to the others: no guns allowed here. The Writer had tried

to use one. Soon they'll find that the Professor carries in his bag a Bomb: "it's only a bomb...a 20 kilotons" one, justifies the professor. He'll disassemble it later on.

Now they're close to the Room. Amazingly: the Writer refuses to go into the Room. The same with the Professor. A Stalker must not enter the Room. In fact, nobody entered the Room.

[!!!None of them really wanted their innermost wishes fulfilled?]

They're back on the bar, drinking. The Stalker's wife enters the place and says: "so you're back".

At home Stalker tells his wife he's tired; he's lying down on a sort of library floor,... book shelves as backdrop. Now he's about to rest. He sadly complains to wife: "nobody believes "...the Zone. He's asleep.

The wife monologues: "he's a Stalker....he's not of this world".

She had been told by her husband: you cannot go there. He doubted her wishes could come true.

Daughter Monkey is seated at a table reading a book; then her attention gets drawn to the drink glasses on top of table; she focuses her thought on one of them, and succeeds moving it by the power of her thought. Telekinesis. And another one glass gets moved. The 9th symphony of Beethoven can be heard....as well as the train passing nearby Stalker's home.

The Stalker brought something from the Zone: a dog.

I have read some commentaries on the movie. One possible way of interpreting the Zone, is that it's a ("prophetic") "anticipation of Chernobyl". Another one (also plausible): a collective rumination on the nuclear accident which really happened in Chelyabinsk, back in 1957.

Either way the movie goes well beyond science-fiction. In my view, it's mainly a piece of art: a cinematic probe into the "inner world" /wishing-world of humans. Just like Tarkovsky stated: "I am interested in man...he contains a universe within himself".

A note of admiration for the flute-music.

For more insights, an article by Geoff, on the meanings of the movie:

[http:// www.guardian.co.uk/film /2009/feb/06/andrei-tarkovsky-stalker-russia-gulags-chernobyl](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/feb/06/andrei-tarkovsky-stalker-russia-gulags-chernobyl)

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4Jyap...>

Pavol Hardos says

Here is a book about a movie. No, let me rephrase that. Here is a discursive, personal, digressive, long-winding, breezy, ponderous, chatty, observant, essayistic commentary blog-post of a book about a movie, Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. It is *about* the movie in the most obvious sense - it is a summary, nay, that's not it, more like - as Dyer would put it - it is an expansion and a commentary of the movie, bit by bit reconstruction of every scene with running comments about the production (footnoted), about the author himself, about works of art, about life. You should read it. You should not read it unless you've seen the movie, probably. But then, you should have seen the movie already, shouldn't you. This might end up being the book you should have read about the movie you should have seen. Just another reminder of your colossal failure as a human being then.

Um, anyway.

I read it and enjoyed it. I probably enjoyed it just as much for itself as for the very idea of reading *it* - this book - about the movie - *that* movie, the very great movie that affirms my taste as a cinephile simply for my recognizing it as a masterpiece, having seen it (only twice) and having it seared in my visual memory. So I was predisposed to liking this book, because it affirms that I am in on it. I know what the journey to the room is. I think. So there.

Yes, if you've seen *Stalker* this book will cater to your ego, there's no point in fighting it. Regardless of whether you've seen the movie or not, this book will most likely shuffle your "Things I Want To Do Most Of All Right Now" list and put "Watching *Stalker*" in the Top 3. (Top 3 applicable only if you've been severely neglecting some bits from the bottom of Maslow's pyramid of needs.)

Jim says

What we have here is a triptych: three linked works of art, one based on the other. First there was Boris and Arkady Strugatsky's **Roadside Picnic** (1972), perhaps the most memorable of their science fiction novels. Then came Andrei Tarkovsky's film **Stalker** (1979), ostensibly based on it and, in fact, employing the Strugatsky brothers as screenwriters. Now there is Geoff Dyer's long essay entitled *Zona: A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room*. This last is in a genre by itself, an extended commentary retelling the story of the film with lengthy footnoted riffs about how the film has impacted Dyer's life and imagination.

All three works are masterpieces in their own right. I have now read both books as well as seen the film, and I yearn to reacquaint myself with all three of them.

Is there something perhaps a little perverse about writing a ruminative essay about something that comes from something else. Have we somehow put ourselves too many removes from the original work by the Strugatsky brothers? Or does it matter, inasmuch as both **Stalker** and **Zona** are totally absorbing, as was **Roadside Picnic**.

Perhaps I should draw back a little and give you some idea of the world of the composite work of art I think of as "The Roadside Stalker Zone." We are some time in the future, in a grimy post-industrial wasteland in a small country near an area once visited by extraterrestrials who just happened, for whatever reason, to leave strange inexplicable things behind -- including a room which, if you enter it, grants all your innermost desires. (Never mind that the only known person to have visited it, named Porcupine, hanged himself shortly thereafter.)

These zones formerly visited by the extraterrestrials (who have all moved on without getting their visas stamped) have been sealed off by the authorities. But there is an active "black market" of individuals called stalkers who take people to visit the zones and perhaps bring some things back -- things which are inexplicable. The children of these stalkers are themselves strange, like Monkey, the film's Stalker's daughter, who has the power of telekinesis, which we do not learn until the very end of the film.

Stalker takes two individuals, referred to only as the professor and the Writer, into the zone. Their journey is a journey of self-discovery. Do they enter the room? I do not wish to spoil the story for you, so I urge you to consume the entire triptych, in order of publication or release, to come to the same realization that I have arrived at: That Geoff Dyer is a phenomenal writer whose work I am going to enjoy reading in the months and years to come.

Lee Kofman says

This is one of the most original books I've ever read in terms of its structure. Only a genius like Dyer can pull this through – to describe scene by scene Stalker, one of the most tedious films ever (not in his view, of course!) and make this description captivating and universal. Basically, Dyer uses the film as a mere device once again to address his usual, exciting, obsessions with the place of art in our lives, Rilke, timelessness of some geographical spaces, shabbiness of the human nature and above else – the question of how we should live our lives. I also adore how boldly in this book Dyer reinvented the use of footnotes, making them rival the 'proper' pages, often taking over what is supposed to be the main text. The more I read Dyer, the more I am convinced that he is one of the most original writers of 21st century. I mean here 'original' in its best, deeply intellectual, not gimmicky, sense.

lisa_emily says

Better than three stars, but not quite four; however I may change my mind in the future if I find this book has rattled around in my mind for a while.

The best way to read this book:

1. Get the Dyer book, put on shelf.
2. Scan the movie listing regularly to see when Tarkovsky's Stalker will be showing. You really need to see the movie in a theatre, mostly so you can be held hostage for nearly three hours to the movie's pacing. To watch it in your home, it would be too easy to pause it. You really need to be oppressed by this movie. Plus, you need a big sound system. The soundtrack is worth it.
3. After seeing the movie, wait at least two weeks, maybe even up to a month to read the Dyer book.

You will find much humor in the book, not so much in the movie. I don't know if the book will enlighten you to the meaning of the movie anymore than you may have been able to eek out on your own; but the book will

draw all sorts of threads, including references to *Stalker* in other movies, music, etc.

I don't think reading this book without seeing the movie would be very enjoyable. Maybe if you are a huge Dyer fan; I've read a few of Dyer's books and articles, can't say if I am a huge fan. I have seen the Tarkovsky film though - this and a few others. I wish Dyer could've answered some of my questions re: the movie, like- what's up with the dog? He talks about the dog, who took commands in Estonian; but where did the dog come from, what does he mean? And why so much water in Tarkovsky's film, so much water.

The book is lot more fun and easier to read than watching the movie, but I really don't think you should take the shortcut. Watch the movie- then read the book.

Paul Bryant says

I love books about a single movie – two recent corkers were *Chain Saw Confidential* and *The Disaster Artist*, both written by actors. But those short love-letter-to-my-favourite-film books are good too, like *Withnail & I* and *Meet Me in St Louis* in the BFI Film Classics series. In those kind of books you get to find out who was doing what with who to get the part (Lucille Bremer as Judy's sister) and who nearly got the part (Shirley Temple for Dorothy in *Wizard of Oz*! Of course!) and all that. Hilarious.

So this book is by a guy who wrote one of my real favourite book-about-books, which is *Out of Sheer Rage*. That is a book about how Geoff *didn't* write a book about DH Lawrence.

Geoff Dyer is all about the meta.

But he's chatty with it. So here in this book *Zona* Geoff gets to write about his favourite movie. And I thought, in the words of Jeremy Clarkson, "what could possibly go wrong?"

This Dyer guy has got it made. He seems to have been given a contract by his publisher which says : *just write about whatever stray idea and whimsical notion that pops into your head and we'll slap it between two covers. Don't think twice!* So he writes about jazz, DH Lawrence, Venice, World War One, John Berger, Paris, and on and on.

You don't have to like or know much about DH Lawrence to enjoy *Out of Sheer Rage*. You just have to be able to empathise with a guy endlessly putting off something which he himself volunteered to do and which has now become a *crushing burden*. We've all been there.

However, in *Zona*, we have a very detailed account of this movie called *Stalker* by Tarkovsky and really, you hafta have seen it, which so far, I haven't. I thought I could wing it. But really, this movie sounds dull. Boring people doing boring things boringly.

You're going to say – but that is a perfect description of *all Eric Rohmer movies*, of which I am a big fan. Well, boring is a personal thing. After all, some people think books are boring. Imagine that.

So I got to page 80 and set it down.

What I really want to do is watch *Goto, Island of Love*. That's a 1969 movie by Walerian Borowczyk which I saw once in an art house years ago & always wanted to see again and looked for in vain until last week

when I found it by accident in a discount shop called Fop – two disc edition, couldn't believe it.

So here it sits but I'm nervous – it might turn out to be terrible. I thought it was great back then, but who knows. My former self did not have perfect taste. I even had a Moodyblues album once. Don't tell anyone.

Leo Robertson says

Dear Goodreader who has found their way to this review looking in hope as always for something to feed their soul, give me your time and I shall not disappoint!

But first: what the hell, man? This isn't a book, this is an inflated Guardian article! (Was I surprised or not, sad or glad to learn that parts had indeed appeared in The Guardian before? Presumably with more usage of the word "Machiavellian" - evidence:

<http://www.theguardian.com/public-lea...>

<http://www.theguardian.com/football/2...>

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisf...>

[http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-rad... \)](http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-rad...)

I got this second-hand but this badboy was retailing at an outrageous 16.99 pounds in its prime! I'm blown away! That's like 2-3 t-shirts in this day and age...

The guy just describes what happens in the film Stalker, occasionally interjecting with some self-deprecatory anecdote or quote from a book on/by Tarkovsky that I (and probably most others interested in the subject) also own.

And he claims that von Trier's Antichrist is nonsense! So he is clearly no authority on cinema anyway!

Here are my notes on Antichrist that are, I believe, of equal depth and with as much authority as Zona, but mercifully concise and totally free. +

THE END.

- Realistic portrayal of panic attacks/ grief
- Classical music, B&W opening tad indulgent
- Overwrought teddy symbolism
- Tarkovsky green, nature, blurred nightmares with churning trains (a la von Trier's EUROPA?) sense of dread.
- Using partner as a therapist! Bad idea.
- Film can remain interesting with only two people- stunning- like a work of theatre
- Light + nature + symbols of good turn evil here. Because they are associated with life + child- "tastes like ashes" line from Melancholia.

- Fear without stimulus (sometimes the definition of angst)
- Sex as a release- early indication of Nymphomaniac
- Darkness in the house and all the bedding and objects.
- Bergmanesque cuts of horrified faces on the train
- Cabin like in Solaris—> Bach from Solaris played in Nymphomaniac
- Proust's trees with souls in Nympho (and the child is called Marcel -_-) here in Antichrist trees have a personality.
- Fear of nature is a fear of human nature (deer trailing a dead child)
- Von Trier attempts to collect his own symbols like Bergman does
- Nature destroying itself- backwards cycle of life- self-disembowelling fox (like the Ourobouros worm) and the dead child that eats the mother alive. Like Hitchens speaking of cancer as a cruel parody of childbirth, this is the destruction of the female by the child.
- "Now I can hear what I couldn't hear before" - what people with depression believe.
- Fear of nature = fear of the damage that can be done to us by: - depression - loss - living
- Perhaps he didn't want her to be fixed. He enjoyed the exercise of fixing her (touches toolbox early on... inherent curiosity for nature)
- Sometimes it seems that the purpose of nature (of all human beings) is to cause as much pain as possible. Kind of nature that causes people to do evil things against women. Nature does evil against Gainsbourg by taking her child. She desires proof that this is true but Dafoe doesn't allow it.
- She had problems with breathing and now he suffocates her. Killed by her grief, despair, pain.
- Colour of the blood sticks out on the muted background. Female penetration of the male, sticking her finger in the wound.
- Ball and chain = grindstone in the ankle, crippling her son's feet.
- "You said you wanted to help me." Is depression outside of human ability to control? Alleviate? Because of its unspeakable violence on the psyche outwardly reflected in the film.
- The couple as the two feuding sides of one person after a tragedy. Is it then a good thing that Dafoe survives? He kills the irrational violent and pessimistic side of the self? Or is it a display of inevitable gynocide?
- 1. Grief - deer with dead baby
- 2. Pain- self inflicted pain- the fox
- 3. Despair- the raven.
- "There's no such constellation" - von Trier admits that the symbols come from a shamanistic ritual where he took drugs.
- Clitoris- autogynocide. Anhedonia and mutilation of the place from where the child came- cursing her pleasure as perhaps the source of the child's death- seems to suggest that she did see the child fall- but could be a manifestation of extreme guilt.
- Dafoe finds and eats berries- is rewarded and sustained by nature. Finds a feather and sees the Three Beggars. The feather a symbol of his triumph over nature having killed the raven previously?
- Bold move to dedicate the film to Tarkovsky?? Yet von Trier believes himself the greatest living director (and me too a bit!)
- She follows what she thinks are the plaintive cries of the child- the solipsism of depression, thinking the child isn't there for her! "Nic wasn't there for me." Unattentiveness and unwavering self-focus. Narcissism so pronounced.
- Robert Herrick's spiteful poem "Upon some women"
- Twin Peaks set in same place. Lynchian allusions with droning sound.

The aria in the beginning is *Lascia ch'io pianga*- let me weep
 My cruel fate
 And sigh for liberty

May sorrow break these chains
Of my sufferings, for pity's sake.

- A witch attuned to the inherently evil nature of Eden.
- Talking fox was Dafoe's voice.

Film allusions:

DON'T LOOK NOW

THE NIGHT PORTER

IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES
