

Director
Andrei Tarkovsky

Cast
Nikolay Burlyayev
Valentin Zubkov
Evgeniy Zharikov
Stepan Krylov
Valentina Malyavina

Screenplay
Vladimir Bogomolov, Mikhail Papava

Photography
Vadim Yusov

Art Director
Evgeni Cherniaev

Editor
Ludmila Feganova

Music
Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov

Producer
G Natanson

A Mosfilm Production

Run time: 95 Minutes

Certificate: 12A

Russian with English subtitles

USSR 1962

Black and White

Aspect Ratio: 1.33:1

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IVAN'S CHILDHOOD

Screening as part of Sculpting Time: Andrei Tarkovsky Nationwide Touring Programme



Andrei Tarkovsky's debut feature *Ivan's Childhood* (aka *My Name Is Ivan*) was described by the Guardian's Philip French as "one of the great movies about the horrors of the second world war". Based on a short story by Vladimir Bogomolov and shot in the damp bleakness of Belarus' Pripet Marshes, it's an account of the travails of the titular 12-year-old boy, who is used as a scout by the Soviets after his parents are killed by the Nazis.

Tarkovsky described Ivan – played by the unnervingly accomplished Kolya Burlaiev – as "a character created and absorbed by war", someone whose life was in constant conflict. And it is.

Apart from the strangely arresting opening scenes of him playing on a beach, Ivan and the older officers caring for him – captain Kholin, lieutenant Galtsev and corporal Katasonych – his war is presented as a never ending cycle of daily nightmares and nightly terrors where he's haunted by what has befallen him. When he plays, it's to act out the fantasy of avenging his parents, while his school yard is the war soaked marsh that surrounds the action.

The soldiers aren't fit to be parents either (there's a vague idea he might live with Katasonych after the war), and continue to use him as a scout even after his predecessors young bodies are hung from trees by the Germans. Tarkovsky said he "wanted to see the grave changes which war makes in the life of a man, in this case a very young one."

The film introduced Tarkovsky as a director who took imagery and cinematic vividness, which was called "utterly personal and surprisingly spiritual, even transcendent" by the New Yorker, to new levels. Flashbacks to Ivan's childhood aren't simply a way to fill in the blanks and to explain his actions, they're opportunities to put the camera where it usually doesn't venture and create moments that weren't just calling cards but a blueprint for one of cinema's most iconoclastic careers.

The horrifying well scene, when Ivan falls into the watering hole, is cinema as fever dream, while Kholin kissing the army nurse Masha as he holds her over a trench in a forest of birch trees is as beautiful as the aforementioned well scene is harrowing. As a Soviet film, *Ivan's Childhood* took a divergent course by placing the individual front and centre. The war, although always lurking in the background, is the setting for a young boy's tragedy, one which drags the soldiers in too and forces them to contemplate their decision to keep a young child near conflict.

While other Soviet second world war films, such as *The Ballad of a Soldier*, captured the world that revolves around conflict – romantic or otherwise – *Ivan's Childhood* forces viewers to confront the horror without flinching and in a manner never before seen.

By Lanre Bakare, deputy arts editor of Guardian US