

Vivarium (2019) Finnegan

P Michell, 2023

Vivarium is a surreal / [horror film](#) / ? directed by Lorcan Finnegan, from a story by Finnegan and Garret Shanley. An international co-production between Ireland, Denmark, and Belgium, it stars [Imogen Poots](#), [Jesse Eisenberg](#), [Jonathan Aris](#), and [Éanna Hardwicke](#). It premiered at the [Cannes Film Festival](#) on 18 May 2019, and was limited released in Ireland on 27 March 2020. The film follows a couple (Eisenberg and Poots) who are forced to care for a mysterious [humanoid](#) creature while trapped in a strange, [vivarium](#)-like neighbourhood.

(Wikipedia)

US\$4 million budget.

Rotten Tomatoes - *Vivarium* may confound almost as often as it intrigues, but this well-acted ? / horror hybrid has interesting ideas—and explores them with style."

[? what other genre do you think ...]

Creative Personnel:

Lorcan Finnegan – Director / co-scriptwriter (11 credits)

Known for this, *Without a Name* (2016) and *Nocebo* (2022).

After completing a BA in graphic design in Dublin, Lorcan moved to London to work for Charlie Brooker's (Black Mirror, Nathan Barley) company Zeppotron as a motion designer, editor and later as a director.

In 2004 Lorcan returned to Dublin to set up Lovely Productions. Since then Lorcan has written and directed several award winning short films, TV commercials and music videos.

Garret Shanley – Co Scriptwriter (9 credits)

Original story. Known for this, *Without a Name* (2016) and *Nocebo* (2022), *Realm beyond Reason* (2020).

Phillip Murphy - Production Design (44 credits)

Known for this, *The Tourist – S02*, *The Bricklayer*, *Moonhaven Invasion*, *The Offering*, [Reign of Fire \(2002\)](#) and [King Arthur \(2004\)](#).

works in the Film and Television industry, BAFTA winner and three times nominated for Primetime EMMY. Is a member of the Set Decorators Society of America. Recipient of both the American and British Art Directors Guild award

MacGregor - Cinematography (28 credits)

MacGregor, a Madrid-born cinematographer based in Los Angeles, CA, known for films such as "Fall" (2022) and "Kandahar" (2023) and for his work on award-winning documentaries such as "The Mauritania Railway: Backbone of the Sahara". He is known for creating visually striking and emotionally impactful films that address social and political issues.

Imogen Poots – Gemma (50 credits)

British actress Imogen Poots was born in Hammersmith, London, England,

Poots' initial screen debut was a (2004) role in British medical drama [Casualty \(1986\)](#).

She made her big screen debut as Young Valerie in [V for Vendetta \(2005\)](#), then went on to appear in various projects, including [28 Weeks Later \(2007\)](#), [Me and Orson Welles \(2008\)](#), [Centurion \(2010\)](#), [Bouquet of Barbed Wire \(2010\)](#), [Fright Night \(2011\)](#), [A Late Quartet \(2012\)](#), [Greetings from Tim Buckley \(2012\)](#), and [The Look of Love \(2013\)](#).

Jesse Eisenberg – Tom (51 credits)

Curly haired and with a fast-talking voice, Jesse Eisenberg is a movie actor, known for his Academy Award nominated role as Mark Zuckerberg in the 2010 film The Social Network. He has also starred in the films The Squid and the Whale, Adventureland, The Education of Charlie Banks, 30 Minutes or Less, Now You See Me and Zombieland. Additionally, he played Lex Luthor in the 2016 film Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice.

Johnathan Aris – Martin (105 credits)

Jonathan Aris is the son of the late British character actor [Ben Aris](#) but, despite having a thespian as a father, acting was not his first choice. He studied painting at Camberwell School of Art and read Russian and Italian at Cambridge University before training as an actor at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London. Like his father, Jonathan has chiefly been seen in character roles, notably on television as the private secretary to the (female) Prime Minister in [The Amazing Mrs Pritchard \(2006\)](#). He also does a great number of voice-overs for television commercials and narration for documentaries. He has made numerous stage appearances and was in the original London cast of "Fame - the Musical".

Senan Jennings – Young Boy (11 credits)

Senan Jennings is known for this, [Wolf \(2021\)](#) and [The Wise Guy](#).

Eanna Harwicke – Older Boy (13 credits)

Known for this, [Lakelands \(2022\)](#) and [Smother \(2021\)](#).

Trivia

Poots offered Eisenberg a male lead role, and Eisenberg accepted the offer. Poots said, "I thought Jesse would be awesome to play Tom. Luckily, he was available and up for it, which I'll say is super cool. On the page, it was certainly a female-centric film in the sense that Gemma had been written as "the lead" or what have you. It's quite rare for a male actor to say, "Yeah, I'll play the other part...." So, it was really, really cool and supportive that he was up for it. That's how it came about, and we got to work not long after that. He's amazing that way; he's so loyal and cool."

Vivarium won distribution prize at Cannes Film Festival Critics Week 2019.

It was shot in locations in Belgium and Ireland before moving to [Ardmore Studios, Wicklow, Ireland](#).

The exteriors for house number 9 were a set that was built inside of a warehouse.

UK program called Inside no. 9 which is an anthology series of strange stories, starring two main actors, each episode occurs in a house or room number 9. This

movie feature house number 9 which also has 2 main actors in a strange story, and could easily be part of the series.

The title is Latin for "place of life". It also alludes to an area, usually enclosed, for keeping and raising animals or plants for observation or research. Often, a portion of the ecosystem for a particular species is simulated on a smaller scale, with controls for environmental conditions.

Review

Vivarium Ending: Yonder's Purpose & The Boy's Identity Explained

BY [KAYLEIGH DONALDSON](#) AND [STEPHEN BARKER](#) (screenrant.com) 2023

While the *Vivarium* movie meaning is somewhat elusive, an examination of the overall plot and ending does shed considerable light on the subject. The sci-fi film *Vivarium*, starring Jesse Eisenberg and Imogen Poots, focuses on the hellish suburbia that is the inescapable town of Yonder as the young couple is forced to raise an alien offspring. Director Lorcan Finnegan's sci-fi thriller tells the story of a young couple trapped in a frightfully uniform suburban neighborhood that quickly reveals itself to be a nightmare.

The movie centers on gardener Tom (Jesse Eisenberg) and kindergarten teacher Gemma (Imogen Poots), a happily unmarried couple who are looking to become homeowners. This leads them to visit a deeply strange estate agent named Martin (Jonathan Aris), who makes lavish promises of the beauty and perfection of a newly built development named Yonder and coaxes them into taking a tour of the *Stepford Wives-type community*. Apart from the high Rotten Tomatoes score garnered by the *Vivarium* movie meaning, Stephen King, the renowned horror author, has also expressed his love for the movie.

Tom and Gemma in Vivarium ...

Vivarium's Yonder is comprised of endless rows of wholly identical homes and roads that always lead back to the same place. Martin leaves Tom and Gemma at house number 9, and the two try to leave but end up going around in circles, which forces them to stay in the Yonder home. Since their attempts to leave end in continual failure, Tom tries to burn down the house out of frustration. The next morning, it's still there, seemingly rebuilt overnight, and now there's a box with a baby boy waiting for them. Attached is a note, which is integral to the *Vivarium* movie meaning: "*Raise the child and be released.*"

In the suburban satire *Vivarium*, Yonder's nameless offspring (Senan Jennings) rapidly grows in size and has an eerie adult-like voice that perfectly mimics both Tom and Gemma. Jesse Eisenberg's character spurns any attempt at fathering the child, while Imogen Poots' Gemma is worn down into a drudging facsimile of motherhood. The Boy screams until he is fed, he refuses to leave Tom and Gemma alone, and he copies their every move. Tom becomes obsessed with their escape and begins digging a hole in their yard, while Gemma attempts to care for the child while maintaining some autonomy in the situation, further adding layers to the *Vivarium* movie meaning.

What Happens In Vivarium's Ending –

Inspired by *Village of the Damned*, in *Vivarium*, The Boy vanishes from Yonder and returns with a book full of symbols. In an attempt to find an escape, Gemma plays a game with The Boy to get him to reveal where he's been; only for him to begin mutating into a monster. Like something out of a John Carpenter sci-fi movie, the boy suddenly grows into a full-blown adult. Tom still digs his hole from morning until night, and eventually, The Boy locks his "parents" out of the house. He starts disappearing every day and Gemma's attempts to follow him prove fruitless.

Eventually, Tom's hole yields a discovery of a corpse in a body bag, adding a level of horror to the *Vivarium* movie meaning. His own health rapidly worsens, and he eventually dies in the Black Christmas actress' arms. At that moment, having said that it's time for him to be "released," The Boy returns to them with a body bag. Shocked and disgusted, Gemma becomes furious enough to attack him with a pickaxe, but he escapes by pulling up the pavement like a rug and sliding into an Escher-esque underground.

Gemma follows and discovers that *Vivarium's* Yonder is full of endless parallel worlds where couples like her and Tom are stuck in identical situations. At this point, it's clear *Vivarium's* alien invasion takes young couples captive as specimens in a deeply horrific experiment. Every single one of them is miserable, some even to the point of suicide. It's this stark imagery that promotes the *Vivarium* movie meaning, as Gemma has lost all autonomy and finds that she and Jesse Eisenberg's character are not the only victims of this horrific place.

Gemma is spat back into her world and dies at the hand of The Boy after being vacuum-packed in a body bag. He dumps their bodies in the hole that Tom dug, fills it back in, and then leaves Yonder to return to the real estate office. There, Martin is old and on the verge of death (though only a year has passed). He passes on his name badge to The Boy and then dies, leaving the new Martin to take his place. A couple walks into the real estate office, and the cycle begins again. Imogen Poots explained in an interview with *Collider*:

"Considering the time we're in right now, it's a film that has the ability to, like a barnacle, latch onto the latest horror show that's occurring, whether that be the housing crisis, or whether that be the expectation on gender roles. It can shape shift, in that way. I'm with you, when it comes to the young couple buying a house. From the outside, they've reached paradise. They've got this lovely house, they've got a child, they've got food delivered and cable TV. It should be like paradise, but it's actually hell because of the claustrophobia and the repetition. I think that was there, in the beginning. It just had to come alive."

Boy's Identity & Yonder's Purpose ...

While it's never made explicit in *Vivarium's* ending, the best interpretation of Yonder, the strange boy that Tom and Gemma are forced to raise, and the *Vivarium* movie meaning is an *AHS* season 2-style alien abduction story. Based on *Vivarium's* ending, it seems that these aliens age rapidly, growing to adulthood within a year and declining from middle age to old age within the same space of time. They sustain themselves by trapping human couples in Yonder and forcing them to raise their weird children in order to continue the parasitic cycle.

The aliens do not appear to form any kind of emotional attachment to their adoptive parents and do not grieve for them when they die. Further proof of the alien abduction theory comes in the form of the strange language that appears in the boy's book and the patterns that show up on the TV. The Boy scuttling under the sidewalk and his horrific transformation adds to

this Vivarium theory too. The impossible space that Gemma stumbles into when she tries to chase the boy seems like an alien construct, as does Yonder itself.

The film explores the *Vivarium* movie meaning and Yonder's purpose through the metaphor of brood parasitism, a natural phenomenon in which some birds will lay their eggs in a stranger's nest in order to trick the other bird into raising their young. *Vivarium* opens with a shot of a newly hatched cuckoo pushing other baby birds out of the nest. The cuckoo eventually becomes so large that when its adoptive parent returns to feed it, the cuckoo looks like it's about to consume the adult bird's head — foreshadowing *Vivarium's* ending.

The *Vivarium* movie meaning takes the behavior of the cuckoo and reimagines it as an alien or extradimensional species like that of the *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* ending that have invaded Earth and forces humans to raise its offspring by trapping them together in a "nest." Taking from influences like *Village of the Damned*, just as some female cuckoos are able to lay eggs that resemble the eggs of the bird species whose nest they are left in, the boy's species is able to imitate humans closely, but not perfectly.

What is Martin in Vivarium ?

Martin is only seen in the very beginning and ending of *Vivarium*, but his odd character has a larger purpose within the overall *Vivarium* movie meaning. His bizarre mannerisms, personality, and origins are only made clear when The Boy reaches adulthood. Martin and The Boy are the same exact thing: an alien child raised by unwilling humans. It's made clear during Gemma's descent that many other families probably don't succeed in raising their prescribed offspring.

While it's never explored what happens to those children in *Vivarium's* weird horror movie ending, Martin is an example of a Yonder "success" story. The alien species seem to maintain their invasion through this strange life cycle. Martin is an alien offspring that a previous Yonder family raised to completion, like The Boy. In *Vivarium's* ending, The Boy takes his place as the new Martin, in order to attract new victims to make the next Martin. It's an explosive revelation that only sheds further light on the *Vivarium* movie meaning.

Real Meaning of Vivarium's Ending ...

At its heart, the *Vivarium* movie meaning is a familiar story about the smothering confines of a supposedly ideal life that's been commoditized for the masses. The white picket fence dream remains a potent force in society, and it's one that's become ever more unattainable to the younger generations, making the forced fantasy all the crueler. Like David Lynch's *Eraserhead* themes, Tom and Gemma are literally stuck in this heteronormative structure of what a couple is "supposed to do" as they get older.

Tom and Gemma have been forced into the suburban life in *Vivarium*, a home they despise, a routine they grow resentful of, and a child neither of them wanted. In the thriller movie *Vivarium*, they are now stuck on a path for life that is both mundane and horrifying: One that ends in their deaths and their bodies left to rot. They aren't alone in this nightmare either, as the parallel worlds of Yonder reveal. This is the world that awaits the white heterosexual middle-class couples to whom this fantasy is primarily sold.

Interestingly, Tom and Gemma never ask out loud why they have been trapped in the world of Yonder, adding a complacency aspect to the *Vivarium* movie meaning. They just get on with it because they have to. Despite *Vivarium's* [high Rotten Tomatoes rating and low IMDb score](#), This is partly what makes *Vivarium* so fascinating: It is keenly aware of the suffocating expectations placed upon people to adhere to societal norms, even as they become more unattainable and less desired by younger generations.

While other movies like David Fincher's *Fight Club* explore similar themes, *Vivarium* also tackles the complex subject of parenthood. Here, to be a parent is to be forced into a one-sided parasitic relationship that will sap you of your very life essence. Tom and Gemma did not want a child but the society of Yonder demanded it, and the boy who grows in years as the days pass is unnerving, lacks imagination, and is utterly helpless without them. It's a blunt metaphor for the realities of parenting, but most stories end such narratives in a happy way, revealing how it was all worth it in the end. Eisenberg spoke with *Collider* about the *Vivarium* movie meaning, explaining:

"It seemed like the fever dream that you'd have the night before you got married or had a baby or bought a house. It's like the unconscious fears we all have about making commitments in our lives, even if it's a commitment that you've chosen, the partner you chose, or the house you wanted to buy or live in. It's just one closer step to your own mortality. So, I just thought it was this brilliant nightmare of that, like the brilliant surrealist movies that evoke certain feelings for us, just through symbols rather than through a more literal depiction of scary, or a literal depiction of a commentary on modern life."

Like an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, there have been plenty of tales about the hell of suburbia, and the *Vivarium* movie meaning is not shy about wearing those influences on its sleeve. *Blue Velvet* comparisons are easy to make and the film is also reminiscent of classic sci-fi horror movies like *Village of the Damned*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. *Vivarium* is a film with the sheer guts to position the act of being parents as potentially the worst thing one could do with their life.

That remains one of society's true taboos, and the *Vivarium* movie meaning pulls no punches with it. Even when Gemma shares tender moments with the boy in [one of the best sci-fi movies of 2020](#), she absolutely refuses to let him call her his mother. Her dying words to him are just that: *"I am not your f***ing mother."* It's a final act of defiance that verbalizes countless people's lives, both within Yonder and in the real world.

Why Vivarium Blew Stephen King's Mind ...

Back in 2020, Stephen King tweeted: *"VIVARIUM (Hulu) blew me away. Rich and strange. If you love it, thank me. If you hate it, don't blame me,"* and this is likely due to *Vivarium's* shared themes with many Stephen King book-to-movie adaptations. Indeed, Yonder's suburban trappings, hidden horrors, and twisted conspiracies are somewhat reminiscent of films like *Pet Sematary*, *It, It: Chapter Two*, *Children of the Corn*, and even *Firestarter*.

Furthermore, despite how the *Vivarium* movie meaning was clearly inspired not just by [Stephen King's work](#), but also by the decades of horror movies and series that came before it, *Vivarium* still succeeds at telling a truly original and compelling tale about alien invasion while also examining the dark side of certain societal norms. Not surprisingly, many who

saw the movie agree with King's stellar review, which is reflected in *Vivarium*'s solid Tomatometer rating.

Director Finnegan Explains ...

Writer/director Lorcan Finnegan sat down with *Collider* to discuss the *Vivarium* movie meaning, and his comments were quite enlightening. Finnegan started off by saying that the movie is, overall, open to interpretation and that even if filmmakers' ideas didn't align with those of audiences, it doesn't necessarily mean that either party is incorrect. Horror movie director Finnegan got the idea for *Vivarium* from a previous short film of his called *Foxes*, where he discussed many of the housing developments made in Ireland in 2008, just before the economy crash. Due to the economy, many of these cookie-cutter developments ended up completely empty — just like *Vivarium*.

After throwing around ideas about the overall loss of community in society and people feeling "trapped in social contracts," Finnegan developed the idea that Yonder would be like the empty developments but stuck in a sort of quantum bubble. He then went on to explain that the *Vivarium* movie meaning plays on young couples' most potent fears about life on an existential level. While he didn't really go into what *Martin* or *the Boy* is, alien or otherwise, he did mention that it's possible they are another species of human that branched off and lived alongside humanity for years. Here's what Finnegan had to say about the *Vivarium* movie meaning:

"And then we were also thinking, 'What is it that young people are afraid of these days on a more existential level?' Are they afraid of big weird winged creatures or are they afraid of their lives becoming repetitive and boring, and all their hopes and dreams getting sucked away by making a couple of wrong choices? Or being tricked into a situation that they hadn't quite predicted that they'd end up getting stuck in. So we were trying to create a monster that would be relevant for that story, and kind of represent consumer capitalism and all of that stuff. Around the same time, Garrett and I were watching this documentary about the lifecycle of the European cuckoo. That kind of opened a door towards something else, which brewed parasitism and ultimately led to the creation of this estate agent as the antagonist, or the antagonistic species in the film."

End Credits hint at meaning ...

As the credits roll after the story is over, the song that soundtracks the credits hints at the real *Vivarium* movie meaning. The song is "Complicated Game" by the English rock band XTC, and the song wasn't chosen to close out the movie simply because it sounds good. The lyrics in the middle of the song read, *"it's just a complicated game,"* and verses include discussions about choices or lack thereof in a cruel and heartless world. That's essentially the *Vivarium* movie meaning, as Tom and Gemma think they have choices, but that's just a fallacy, and they're ultimately playing a "complicated game" where they'll ultimately and inevitably lose.