

It is hard to know where to begin a review of a film whose creators are personal friends and whose progress you have followed for a decade or so, reading the blog, sharing the heartbreak of funding denied, and then basking in the triumph of its final appearance in the New Zealand international film festival last month. Based on the novel of the same name by Mike Riddell, who acted as co-producer and also wrote the screenplay, the film is directed by his wife Rosemary Riddell – a family court judge in her other life.

To say this is a film with heart – to use a tired Hollywood cliché – would not do it justice. Rather, it is a film that excites, entertains and challenges us, cutting right to the heart of the Gospel. The production values are first-rate, the casting inspired, the acting flawless and the cinematography wonderfully inventive. But the truly original contribution of *The Insatiable Moon* is to lay bare the pathologies at the heart of our endlessly acquisitive society and suggest – in the most imaginative ways you are ever likely to see on-screen – a Christian remedy.

The film opens with Arthur, a Maori ex-psychiatric patient living in a halfway house in Ponsonby, using his special magic to make the sun rise. As the self-proclaimed Second Son of God, Arthur's powers enable him to

perform all manner of miracles, but his greatest challenge is to save the house he shares with a number of other men from closure. For this is the early 1990s and Ponsonby is ripe for gentrification, a process that leaves little room for the poor and the marginalised.

Arthur, played to perfection by Rawiri Paratene, is the heart of this remarkable film, despite being surrounded by a large cast of eye-catching characters played by the likes of Ian Mune, Sara Wiseman and Greg Johnson. In Arthur's words and actions we see an extraordinary interplay between the madman and the visionary, the derelict and the prophet. Battling with a mental illness, his heart is full of love and his words sharp with truth. Watching the stream of rush-hour

traffic crawling over the harbour bridge, he says: "Look at all those people hurrying to get where they don't want to be".

Speaking after one of the festival screenings in Dunedin, Mike mentioned that his original novel had made use of magical realism. This technique uses fantasy, vision and dream to change the harsh reality of the world – the endemic greed, self-interest and materialism that undermine society and corrode the hearts of individuals – and, if only for a moment, to make our dreams of peace and justice real.

If you only get out to one movie this year, don't miss this richly imaginative and complex film when it goes on general release at *Rialto* cinemas in October. ■

