



FILM: **LEVIATHAN**

FDG RATING: 3.3 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Andrey Zvyagintsev: *Director, Co-writer*  
Aleksandr Serebryakov: *Actor: Kolya*  
Elena Lyadova: *Actress: Lilia (Kolya's 2<sup>nd</sup> wife)*

DATE: March 22, 2015

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **LEVIATHAN**

If the purpose of the film, *Leviathan*, is to show the hopeless despair of the Russian people who are powerless against the ruling, corrupt partnership of church and state, the film succeeded masterfully. Many of our viewers felt so worn down watching the long, drawn out film, that some had the urge to leave and others grew tired of the dreariness, or felt disdain at the heavy handed pretentiousness. The parallel to the Biblical story of Job goes only as far as the similar series of tragic events. Yes, God works in mysterious ways, but in *Leviathan*, God's mysterious ways reward the corrupt and powerful who fund the church. The Main character, Kolya, is not wrestling with his faith in God, but rather his faith in the Russian state, a formidable controlling force that bends the laws to suit its own appetite.

Kolya, is a mechanic who lives in a small coastal town with his teenage son and 2nd wife, in a very nice, modest house that he built on his family property on a cliff overlooking the sea. The corrupt mayor covets the property and has unjustly demanded to repossess it offering a paltry amount of money for compensation. Kolya refuses to sell the property and enlists the aid of a friend who is now a lawyer in Moscow to legally refute the mayor's claim on the property. At the hearing, a litany of judicial manifestos read aloud in a monotonous drone counter any opportunity for justice for Kolya.

Kolya is then plagued by one tragic event after another including the affair of his wife with his lawyer friend, her questionable death, Kolya's arrest for her murder, the realization that his friends gave statements against him, and finally the demolition of his house so the mayor can erect a new cathedral on the property.

While some of us had strong negative reaction to the cold, dreary film, others thought the film was very effective and made important political and sociological points. One of our resident critics noted the parallel to Hobbes social contract theory (published in 1651 in a book titled *Leviathan*) where total power is surrendered to the state or monarchy because the nature of man is antagonistic and prone to violence without a strong government. But in this *Leviathan*, the state has too much power and is not using it for the good of the people.

The acting was superb by a very interesting cast of characters. The cinematography was well done and the Russian scenery was fascinating. One of the more humorous scenes was a drunken target practice at photographs of Russian officials. Probably the most dramatic scene at the end was seen from inside Kolya's house when we see the monstrous bull dozer smashing in at us as it crushes the side of his house.

The film told a heavy story that was for some of us also absorbing and memorable. Our ratings scaled the gamut from 2 to 4.5 on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best) with a final cumulative score of 3.3.

Interesting side notes:

Probably to deflect being accused of being critical of his Russian government, Zvyagintsev says the inspiration is the story of Marvin Heemeyer, an American welder and an automobile muffler repair shop owner who, in 2004, outraged over the outcome of a zoning dispute, went on a rampage with a Komatsu bulldozer and demolished the town hall, the former mayor's house, and other buildings in Granby, Colorado.

The film made partly with money from Russia's culture ministry is criticized by the culture minister and widely denounced as anti-Russian. Regarding state funding of films, the culture minister is quoted as saying "all flowers should grow but we will only water the ones we like." Other officials said they are considering a ban on any films that "defame the national culture..." The film was only shown for 2 weeks last year at one St Petersburg cinema in Russia, to fulfill a requirement for it to be nominated for Russia's Oscar entry.

The Orthodox church has denounced the film. Orthodox activist Kirill Frolov wrote, "Leviathan is filthy libel against the Russian church and Russian state."

The film won Best Foreign Language film at the Golden Globes.



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See you at the movies!

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