



One of the hardest things to decide, as you stumble out of *Leviathan* is whether you have watched a large movie or a small one. Much of the action is stuck on spits of land at the edge of the Kola Peninsula, in northwestern Russia. Moscow is hopelessly distant; one character, offered a chance to move there and begin afresh, scorns the very thought. There are no armies on the march, or international incidents. Rather, the fate of a few citizens, unregarded and often unsavory, lies in the balance. Many conversations start and end around a kitchen table. Why, then, should we be left with such an impression of grandeur, limitless suffering, and wrath?

Kolya lives near the shore, in a ramshackle house where his family has dwelt for generations. He has a beautiful wife, Lilya, and a teenage son, Roma, from an earlier marriage. Father and son express their mutual love in fisticuffs, sometimes playful, sometimes not. The house is menaced by the mayor, a squat and unrelenting brute named Vadim. He wants to develop the site, and what the mayor wants he gets. In an extraordinary scene, a judge reads out a ruling in favor of Vadim against Kolya, rattling forth the words at a pace that would put Danny Kaye to shame, while the camera slowly worms toward the bench.

Into this setup comes Dmitriy, a buddy of Kolya's, now a lawyer, and the closest thing to a sophisticate that the film can supply. He challenges Vadim, and even tries to blackmail him with a file of former sins; imagine how well that works. One of the great virtues of *Leviathan*, and a source of its surprising

spaciousness, is how zealously the director, Andrey Zvyagintsev, takes time to follow minor characters to a point where their predicaments strike a major chord. It happens with Dmitriy, who, not because he is dashing but simply because he seems different; it happens with Lilya, whose desperation swells at every turn; and it happens, unforgettably, with Roma, a spitfire of confusion and resentment, who spends his evenings with a gaggle of other youths, learning how to drink.

Dear God, the drinking. The people in this movie put away vodka like marathon runners taking on water. Without it, who could stand the pace? Alcohol is for every occasion: to toast, to mourn, to oil the wheels of a fight. Policemen are among the champion boozers. "Are you O.K. to drive?" a woman asks her husband. "I'm a traffic cop, aren't I?" he replies. The blend of clear liquor and tar-black humour is served up without cease, most lavishly at a birthday celebration by the sea, where the wives cook chicken while their menfolk, as drunk as lords and armed like mercenaries, loose off weapons at will. The movie itself is taking comic potshots here, but what stays in the air, once the scene is over, is a whiff of unmanageable wildness, as though the edges of civilization had been clawed. If Zvyagintsev begins and ends *Leviathan* with seascapes, and with the smash of waves against eroded rocks, he is not showing off his majestic setting. He is reminding us that everything, stones and nation-states, can be eaten away.

Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*

WRITING CREDITS: Andrey Zvyagintsev/Oleg Negin **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Mikhail Krichman **MUSIC :** Andrey Dergachev/Philip Glass
CAST: Nikolay Aleksay Serebryakov | Lilya Elena Lyadova | Dmitriy Vladimir Vdovichenkov | Mer Roman Madyanov

VOTING FOR *Kajaki* A30 | B17 | C3 | D0 | E0 | Rating 88.5% | Attendance 55

Our next screening | **Miss Violence** | Tuesday 16 February 2016. 8.00pm

'...still-tempered, mounting nasty...'