LEVIATHAN
(LEVIAFAN)

Release: 2014
Cert (UK): 15
Language: Russian
Runtime: 140 mins
Director: Andrey Zvyagintsev
Writer: Oleg Negin, Andrey Zvyagintsev
Cinematographer: Mikhail Krichman
Cast: Aleksey Serebryakov, Elena Lyadova, Roman Madyanov

The film was apparently inspired by the story of Marvin Heemeyer (who took on the local Colorado state in an armoured bulldozer), the Book of Job and even Michael Kohlhass, the film of which we saw last year.

'Kolia (Alexey Serebriakov) is a car mechanic with a modest property on prime real estate: a beautiful spot on the Barents Sea, but a crooked mayor called Vadim – a wonderful performance from Roman Madyanov, looking something like Boris Yeltsin – wants this land, and hits Kolia with a compulsory purchase order. Kolia's old army buddy Dimitri (Vladimir Vdovichenkov), now a slick Moscow lawyer, has an incriminating file on Vadim that he promises will induce Vadim to back down, but attempting to blackmail Russia's well-connected gangster class is fraught with danger.' – Peter Bradshaw, Guardian.

The result is a film about the small man versus the state, the church and the mafia, shot beautifully (Zvyagintsev is famous for his precise composition and the use of long, lingering shots) and well acted (Madyanov gets high praise from nearly all critics). It combines high drama with comedy (especially some of the scenes of drunkenness as both the villains and the heroes drown their sorrows in vodka). It was one of the main contenders for the Palme d'Or at Cannes this year - though Zvyagintsev had to make do with Best Screenplay in the end. All Zvyagintsev's films have won awards ('The Return', 'The Banishment', 'Elena'), but this one seems to be deemed his best so far.