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'Leviathan' Director Zvyagintsev Wins Jury Prize for New Film 'Loveless' at Cannes

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Director Andrei Zvyagintsev and cast members Maryana Spivak and Alexei Rozin pose at the photo call for 'Loveless' at the 70th Cannes Film Festival. **REUTERS**

Acclaimed Russian director Andrei Zvyagintsev, whose bleak depiction of a provincial man's struggle against corruption in "Leviathan" brought him global fame in 2014, has won the jury prize at the 70th Cannes Film Festival for his new picture "Loveless."

The film, which focuses on an estranged Russian couple who are in the throes of a harrowing divorce when their 12-year-old son disappears, was selected for the award by the international jury, headed by Spanish director Pedro Almodovar.

"The main focus for us was the issue of how one person can live with another. The principal characters are on a battlefield: 12-13 years of conjugal life are behind them, and suddenly they

find themselves with nothing," Zvyagintsev told journalists after the announcement of the jury's decision.

While the director was keen to stress that "Loveless" is about personal relationships rather than politics, he admitted that it had been difficult to completely escape current realities while working on the film, which has led many to draw parallels between the subject of "Loveless" and the situation in Ukraine.

"This metaphor is really just a background. This is a story about people, about the absence of empathy, about constant egoism, self-indulgence, and I didn't want to turn it into a political statement. Although this background is absolutely clear, and we couldn't not make use of it," he said.

However, many critics have identified a clear link between the intimate drama at the heart of the movie and the socio-political context in which the action takes place.

Writing in the New York Times, Manohla Dargis described "Loveless" as "a vision of breathtaking, casual cruelty that inexorably shifts from the personal into an indictment of a soul-sick country."

Zvyagintsev emphasized that the award was a "recognition of the merit of the whole group" that had worked on the picture. "A prize from a festival of the level of Cannes is an unbelievable springboard for the film," he said.

Zvyagintsev has previously won awards at Cannes for his film "Elena," which won the main prize in the "Special View" category in 2011, and for "Leviathan," which was named Best Screenplay in 2014.

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