



Money and Family in Russia

A new kind of thriller examines the ties that bind us

ELENA: Directed by Andrey Zvyagintsev. Written by Zvyagintsev and Oleg Negin. Cinematography, Mikhail Krichman. Editor, Anna Mass. Music, Philip Glass. Starring Nadezhda Markina, Andrey Smirnov, Yelena Lyadova and Alexey Rozin. Zeitgeist Films, 2012. 109 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Elena begins with such a long, slowly shifting shot that the image — a bare tree branch, a black bird, an apartment balcony — becomes ominous. The branch blurs into the apartment, which comes into focus as a large, sterile, tasteful place, spacious and passionless, and clearly expensive.

Russian director Andrey Zvyagintsev's film keeps shifting, languidly and elegantly, as it runs its course. It's a thriller of sorts, but quietly so; what makes it nerve-racking is in large part what you bring to it as a viewer. If you're used to American films that are strung taut as a bowstring, ready to snap at you at any second, you'll wait for the knife to twist, the drama to peak, and when it doesn't — at least not the way we've been trained to expect — the film becomes even more uncomfortable.

At first, you might mistake the relationship between Elena (Nadezhda Markina) and Vladimir (Andrey Smirnov) for that of live-in housekeeper and employer. She wakes in a different room, ties her hair, and goes to pull the curtains in Vladimir's larger, more stately bedroom. She fixes breakfast, and their chat about what the day holds grows tense when the subject of her son arises. When Vladimir asks for another cup of coffee, Elena doesn't hesitate, or tell him to make it himself.

Gradually, it becomes clear that Elena and Vladimir are married. Their relationship is not a partnership; he's a wealthy retired businessman, and she's a former nurse who has been married to Vladimir for only a few years. Each has a

child from a former marriage: his spoiled daughter, Katya (Yelena Lyadova), lives off her father's wealth, while Elena's son, Sergey (Alexey Rozin), has grown used to taking money from his mother, who doesn't need her pension. Elena doesn't seem to resent this; her time with Sergey and his children brings out a lightness in her, a happiness that her comfortable life with Vladimir doesn't provide. But Sergey's teenage son is of an age to be drafted, and a much larger sum of money is required in order to change his fate.

Vladimir, who respects the ability to earn money above all else, will not budge on sharing his wealth: It's Sergey's job to provide for his own child, as Vladimir has for his daughter. When Vladimir falls ill, he decides to make a will, giving his estate to Katya and leaving Elena with a monthly stipend. Elena is horrified: There will be no way to save her grandson from the Russian army unless she does something drastic.

Luxurious cinematography, careful choices about focus and editing, sparing and beautiful use of Philip Glass' *Symphony No. 3* and excellent, constrained performances, particularly from Markina, give *Elena* much greater depths than its plot suggests. Quietly, insistently, the film asks a lot of questions about class and entitlement. In a divided society, who survives? Who flourishes, and why? How do we make choices in the face of arbitrary divisions of wealth and privilege? When lives are on the line, who do we choose, and what's the fallout? Who will you judge for their actions when everyone acts in self-interest? Zvyagintsev's uncomfortable film masterfully tells an ugly story that ends where it starts; life goes on inside and outside the apartment, no matter what has or hasn't changed. **EW**

	9/20 THU	9/21 FRI	9/22 SAT	9/23 SUN	9/24 MON	9/25 TUE	9/26 WED	9/27 THU
schedule for 9.20 - 9.27								
A modern twist on the classic noir thriller ELENA In Russian	4:30 7:45	2:50 7:45	4:30 7:45	4:30 7:45	4:30 7:45	4:30 7:45	4:30 7:45	4:30 7:45
RUBY SPARKS	5:25 10:10	5:25 10:10	3:00 5:25	5:25	5:25	5:25	5:25	5:25
SLEEPWALK WITH ME	4:30 6:30 8:30	7:00	2:30 7:00	2:30 7:00	7:00	7:00	7:00	7:00
SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED	5:15 7:20 9:25	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00	9:00
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THE BOURNE LEGACY (DIGITAL) PG-13 1:25, 4:25, 7:25, 10:20	LAWLESS (DIGITAL) R 11:50, 2:20, 5:00, 7:35, 10:10
THE DARK KNIGHT RISES (DIGITAL) PG-13 11:55, 3:30, 7:00, 10:25	THE ODD LIFE OF TIMOTHY GREEN (DIGITAL) PG 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00
DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: DOG DAYS (DIGITAL) PG 12:05, 2:30, 4:45, 7:05, 9:25	PARANORMAN (3D) PG 3:30, 8:10
DREDD (3D) R 12:30, 5:30, 8:00, 10:30	PARANORMAN (DIGITAL) PG 1:10, 5:50, 10:25
DREDD (DIGITAL) R 3:00	THE POSSESSION (2012) (DIGITAL) PG-13 12:50, 3:10, 5:30, 7:50, 10:10
END OF WATCH (DIGITAL) R 12:00, 2:35, 5:10, 7:45, 10:20	RESIDENT EVIL: RETRIBUTION (3D) R 11:55, 4:55, 7:25, 9:55
THE EXPENDABLES 2 (DIGITAL) R 12:25, 3:05, 5:25, 8:00, 10:30	RESIDENT EVIL: RETRIBUTION (DIGITAL) R 2:25
FINDING NEMO (2012) (3D) G 11:45, 2:25, 3:45, 5:05, 7:45, 9:05, 10:25	TROUBLE WITH THE CURVE (DIGITAL) PG-13 1:55, 4:35, 7:15, 9:55
FINDING NEMO (2012) (DIGITAL) G 1:05, 6:25	
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