

# PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: LEVIATHAN

October 28, 2025

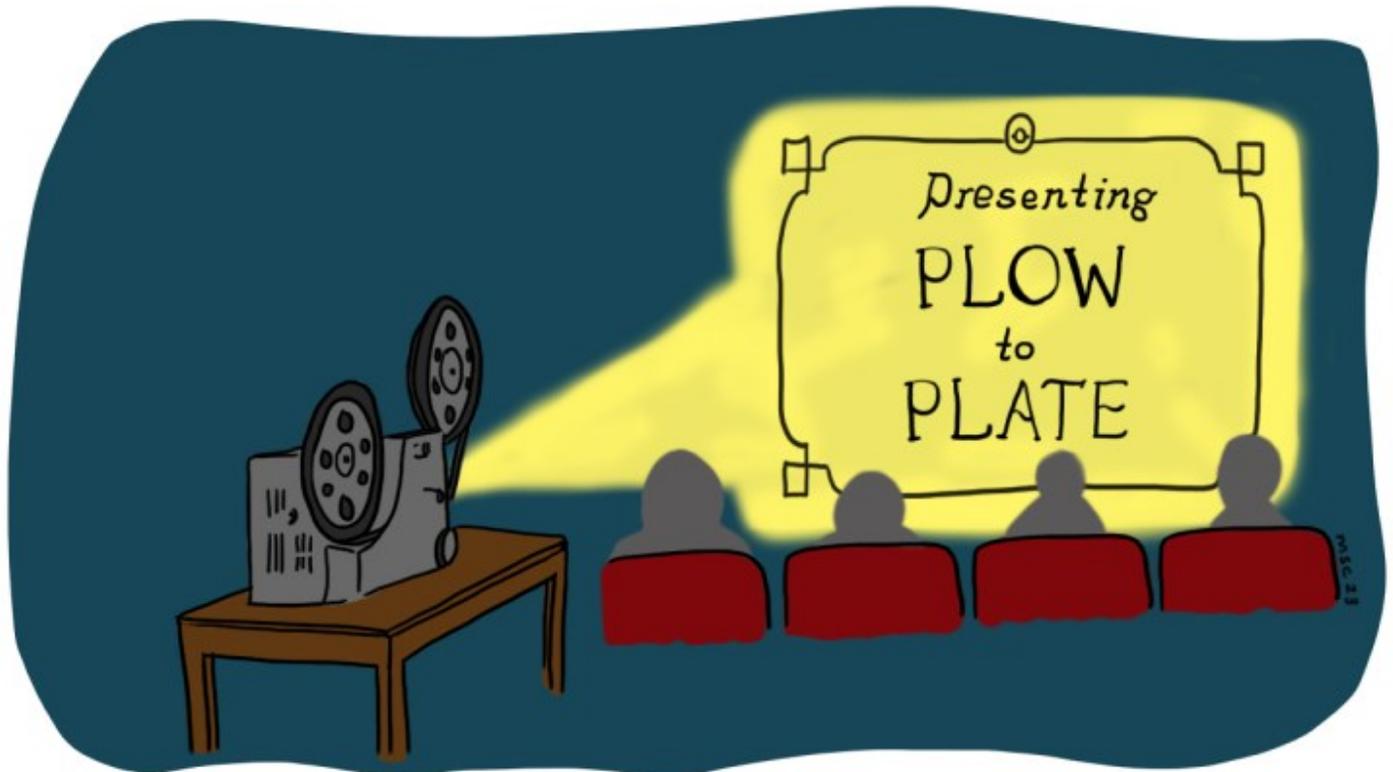


Illustration by Maggie Carson

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*By Adam Rabiner*

Any film that begins with a quote from the book of Job, (“He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment,”) and is titled after the biblical sea monster Leviathan—a symbolic representation of chaos, evil and spiritual enemies—is likely to be a punishing experience. Sure enough, the first words I jotted down as I watched this documentary about a commercial fishing boat off the coast of New Bedford, Massachusetts were: groan, creak, seasickness, clanging chains, waves, unsteady, dizzying, factory clamor, dark, rust, night, unsteady, splash, shouts and murmurs and finally silence. You are beginning to get the picture.

The opening scene is pitch dark, the beginning of another working day (or night) aboard the boat. Burly men with beards and tattoos labor beside one another, not

talking except for the occasional barked command or instruction. And when they speak, their voices are drowned out by the wind or mechanical, metallic banging. You can't really make out what they are saying, or even what language they are speaking. The primary sounds come from hydraulic motors, the unfurling of nets and ropes, the waves, the wind, the seagulls and the straining nuts and bolts of the boat. At the fifteen-minute mark, the camera literally plunges into the gurgling bubbly ocean, offering another similarly disorienting perspective.

The nets haul up the bounty of the sea, whatever it offers, a giant shark (itself a seeming leviathan) or smaller glistening fish that twist and flop around until the grim men in galoshes and raincoats, some smoking cigarettes in the rain, gather to cut their catch into pieces with sharp knives, spilling fish blood and guts onto the sloshing floor. The men know their jobs and routines, deftly slicing up stingrays with machetes or shucking shells.

Taken together, all these images and heavy industrial sounds evoked memories of the spaceship in Ridley Scott's *Alien*, a rusty vessel, out of this world, menacing and deadly and inhabited by tired men in a merciless yet strange (and sometimes beautiful) landscape. Other films that came to mind at various points were *Jaws* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

Grasshopper Film, a distribution company dedicated to the release of independent, foreign and documentary film, listed *Leviathan* under the category "Food Studies." The work tells a truth about our food that you will not find in the sanitized presentation in the aisles of our supermarkets, or even, for that matter, our local fishmonger. This truth involves the fateful moment that these massive bulging nets, fish poking through their holes, offer up their bounty. The fish make the ultimate sacrifice, their heads efficiently lopped off and discarded back into the sea through a portal where flocks of hungry seabirds fly in formation for scraps. Incessantly working, the men sacrifice too. In one extreme close-up, it captures a fisherman's weathered face in all its glorious wrinkles, scars, and visible pores.

In another excruciatingly long scene, the camera focuses on an overweight man sitting alone in the dining room, at 1:07, (a.m. or p.m., it hardly matters, as time does not seem to mean much on this boat) trying to listen to a news broadcast while fighting off exhaustion, coughing occasionally, until he finally succumbs and nods off in front of the TV.

With its vertiginous cinematography and soundtrack of real noise, you are at times on the boat, in and under the water, flying with the scavenger birds. You are in the center of the storm, in the midst of all the dynamic, swirling, twirling, harsh and chaotic forces. You are hurled and tossed around, blown by the wind and swept up by the sea. Yours is every perspective. You are the enduring men, the vanquished, doomed fish, the ravenous birds. You are the hunted and the hunters, the predators and the prey. You are drowning, suffocating, suffering. You are the sky, the sea, the ship. You experience it all. Indeed, you are Job.

***Leviathan*** - Tuesday, November 11, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom

Screening link - <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@gmail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@gmail.com).

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.*