

What We Know About Jude Law's Upcoming Turn as Vladimir Putin

By [Andrei Muchnik](#)

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Actor Jude Law as Vladimir Putin in "The Wizard of the Kremlin." **Novaya Gazeta Europe**

The first on-set photos of English actor Jude Law in his portrayal of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Olivier Assayas' "The Wizard of the Kremlin" were released this week.

The film, an adaptation of Italian-Swiss writer Giuliano da Empoli's novel of the same name, revolves around Vladimir Baranov — a fictional character based on Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin official widely credited with inventing the so-called "sovereign" or "managed" democracy that became a hallmark of Putin's rule.

On-set photos of Law as Putin show him pictured among several colleagues and what looks like a delegation of Arab sheiks from the UAE or Saudi Arabia. He is dressed in a black raincoat over a suit, accented by a yellow tie and polished patent leather shoes.

"I haven't really started work on it yet. I mean, I have, but at the moment it looks like an

Everest to climb, so I'm in the foothills looking up thinking, 'Oh Christ, what have I said?'" Law [said](#) of his upcoming turn as the Russian leader in a conversation with Deadline in January.

The film is being shot in the Latvian capital Riga, which is most likely a stand-in for Moscow.

Empoli's novel became a bestseller in France in 2022, winning him the 2022 Grand Prix du Roman of the French Academy and becoming a finalist for the Prix Goncourt, the French literary Oscar.

While based on Surkov, the fictional character Baranov is not quite true to life; much of his background was invented by Empoli. In the novel, he is the son of an academic and a descendant of Russian aristocrats who were forced to live in the countryside during the Soviet period — but still somehow managed to have servants recruited from the local *kolkhoz*.

In real life, Surkov was the son of a small-town teacher and absentee father from an ethnic Chechen family. He was also a Moscow Institute of Culture dropout who studied theater direction.

It's no wonder that [Russian reviewers](#) of the book noted that it is mostly *klyukva* (“cranberry”) — a Russian term used to describe the exaggerated or unrealistic portrayals of Russia often found in Western films and literature. They also noted a certain idealization of Putinism in the book.

Baranov will be played by Paul Dano, who is mostly known for starring in indie films as well as Hollywood productions like “12 Years a Slave” and “There Will Be Blood.”

The Academy Award-winning Swedish actress Alicia Vikander will play his love interest, Ksenia.

Zach Galifianakis and Tom Sturridge have also been announced as cast members in unspecified roles.

Assayas is known for “Personal Shopper,” which won him the Best Director award at Cannes in 2016, as well as the critically acclaimed television series “Irma Vep.”

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