

## ‘Snowpiercer’ is a Wild Ride, One-of-a-Kind Dystopia

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 4, 2014 - 1:35pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Travelers. We are travelers in this life, and metaphorically we’re mostly in coach, but sometimes manage to get some first class treatment. What if all this traveling were confined to one vehicle? Imagine a future world contained in a constantly traveling train, and the premise for “Snowpiercer” realizes a one-of-a-kind dystopia.

This is obviously highly symbolic, as the “train” is operated by a visionary who foresaw the destruction of the earth’s atmosphere, plunging the rest of world into a permanent winter. The “Snowpiercer” is the name of the train, and as the passengers “move” up to the front, what awaits them get more interesting. This is directed by the oddball filmmaker Jooh-ho Bong, who was more successful in his satirical symbolism within his previous films “Mother” and “The Host.” The premise of “Snowpiercer” suffers from some obvious symbolism, including the casting of the actor who portrays the visionary ruler of the train’s engine, but the situation of this post-apocalyptic earth is so wild and wacky that it makes the film viable as a different form of science fiction.

After a climate change experiment goes awry, the only survivors of earth circle the globe in a perpetual motion choo-choo train invented by the visionary named Wilford. The harshest residents of the Snowpiercer are in the back cars, forced to ingest protein bars – provided by the bureaucrats guarding the front – to stay alive. This includes Curtis (Chris Evans) and Edgar (Jamie Bell), who are plotting revolution. This works for Tanya (Octavia Spencer), whose son was kidnapped, and Gilliam (John Hurt), who had sown the seeds of the uprising.



Train Trippers: Gilliam (John Hurt), Curtis (Chris Evans) and Edgar (Jamie Bell) in ‘Snowpiercer’

*Photo credit: The Weinstein Company*

The initial push is successful, and they kidnap one of the main bureaucrats named Mason (Tilda Swinton, in another eccentric performance) to gain entry to the front cars. What follows is a process of stranger and more luxurious lifestyles towards the front of the train, and clues to the state of the world provided by anarchists Minsoo (Kang-ho Song) and Yona (Ah-sung Ko).

After describing all that, it’s difficult to say that this is actually director Joon-ho Bong’s most mainstream film. Not only is it filled with Hollywood stars – Chris Evans actually doing a take on his many hero roles – but the symbolism is easier and not as satisfying. This is not to say that “Snowpiercer” is not worth seeing, it just has a predictability in it that Bong’s other films simply did not have. If you are seeing the director for the first time with this film, you might find that assessment insane.

Part of the problem is that once the revolution is fomented, there is nowhere really to go. Sure, it gets more luxurious as the denizens move closer to the front – it’s the equivalent of homeless people going to fancy ball – but besides a bizarre classroom led by a perfectly cast Alison Pill as the teacher, nothing is really that compelling. This is especially true in the casting of Wilford, which was so common it is almost deflating.

But the wildest part of this wild ride is how the dystopia was constructed. The “solution” that is come up with for climate change, and the warming of the earth, becomes the problem. The icy environment that emerges is entirely creepy, especially when the trains passes through the former big cities. The origins of the lowest class of the train is probable, and is split between those who got on initially and those born in captivity. And about those protein bars, well...



Mason (Tilda Swinton) Has an Announcement in ‘Snowpiercer’  
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

It’s refreshing, despite their “star” status, to see some familiar faces in an internationally cooperative film directed by a South Korean – Tilda Swinton notwithstanding, she’s on another planet all together. Octavia Spencer keeps proving herself a major actor, Jamie Bell is masterful and Chris Evans may make the Christian Bale crossover from superhero to character player. They’re all marvelous and mysterious, which is exactly what you need as performers.

The “train” is an obvious symbol, as it stays on track as long as the engine functions. But what if it didn’t? What exactly would happen? “Snowpiercer” has some answers, and although some of those might be expected, the film itself is comfortable with those expectations.

*“Snowpiercer” continues its limited release in Chicago on July 4th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Chris Evans, John Hurt, Tilda Swinson, Jamie Bell, Octavia Spencer, Alison Pill, Kang-ho Song and Ah-Sung Ko. Screenplay by Joon-ho Bong and Kelly Masterson. Directed by Joon-ho Bong. Rated “R”*



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