

# Snowpiercer: the cinematic ride of a lifetime!



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Catch a thrilling ride on the action-packed Snowpiercer, a train filled with bustling human lives hurtling through the aftermath of a global apocalypse in one of the most exhilarating films in years!

Snowpiercer is by no means an ordinary train, or just any film set on a train; if you put Murder on the Orient Express, Unstoppable, and Runaway Train in a blender, and mix it with prison dramas like Prison Break, then spice it up with futuristic adventures, the end result will be Snowpiercer. Set in a new Ice Age in which Earth has been frozen for 17 years, Snowpiercer is the only place for survivors in Bong Joon Ho's tense and brutal apocalyptic thriller.



## The chosen few

Climate change has made the planet uninhabitable. Those few who survived the planet's demise live aboard a train that perpetually circles the same track. The tail section is like a slum, filled with people who are cold and hungry, forced to live by their wits, while the front section contains the chosen few, who indulge in alcohol and drugs amid luxurious surroundings. The world inside the train is far from equal.

Chris Evans, who most recently saved the world as Captain America, is almost unrecognisable as a hard-headed young leader from the tail section who stirs up a riot that has been brewing for some time.

In order to liberate the tail section, and eventually the whole train, this hero and his fellow passengers charge toward the engine located at the front of the train, where its creator, the absolute authority, resides in splendour. But unexpected

circumstances lie in wait for humanity's tenacious survivors ...

Through all of his features (Barking Dogs Never Bite, Memories Of Murder, The Host and Mother) Bong demonstrated a propensity for bold ideas that catch an audience off guard and present a new kind of viewing experience in which suspense, humour and humanity co-exist in singular films that cannot be defined by one particular genre.



## **Spectacular and imaginative futuristic adventure**

Snowpiercer is no exception. Although it's a spectacular and imaginative futuristic adventure, it is equally a captivating prison drama, emotionally charged human drama, and deadly satirical black comedy.

Bong first encountered the French graphic novel Transperceneige, on which Snowpiercer is based, in a bookshop near Hongik University in Seoul, South Korea, during the winter of 2005. He read through the entire volume while browsing in the store and became mesmerised by the cinematic potential and was determined to turn it into a film.

"The first thing that grabbed my attention was the unique cinematic space of a train, and the vision of hundreds of metal pieces moving like a living snake carrying people squirming inside," Bong admits. "And the people inside were fighting against each other after being divided into separate and distinct cars - they were not equal in this Noah's Ark-like contraption that held the last survivors on Earth."

The original graphic novel was magnificent and it started from an original idea," Bong admits. "But I had to come up with a completely new story and new characters in order to create a Snowpiercer that was packed with cinematic exhilaration."

The most pressing challenge was creating a sense of constricted space inside the perpetually moving vehicle at the heart of his gripping adaptation. "There is no detour inside a narrow, linear train," Bong explains. "You have to advance forward in order to get anywhere. Bodies clash against each other and sweat is mixed up with blood. I wanted to portray the formidable energy and cinematic sensation that exploded out of this dynamic."

For his work on the script, completed in late 2010, Bong remained true to the themes of his previous works, which examine the nature of human beings under extreme circumstances: a case involving a brutal serial killer, (Memories Of Murder), a monster sprung from the depths of the Hangang River in Seoul (The Host), or a mother who is gradually going insane (Mother).



## Excellent ensemble

If there's one reason to see *Snowpiercer*, besides its mind-blowing spectacle, it's for its excellent ensemble, who delivers powerful performances.

Chris Evans is superb as Curtis, the leader of the uprising, who guides passengers from the tail section through the body of the train into the front section, where the mythical engine is housed, perfectly cast as an ardent hero with the cool head of a strategist and the corresponding actions of someone willing to risk his life for the liberation of his fellow passengers in the rear of the train. Evans is well supported by Jamie Bell (*Billy Elliot*, *King Kong*, *The Adventures Of Tin-Tin*) as his heroic and daredevil buddy.

Other great performances are delivered by John Hurt as the benevolent spiritual leader of the train's tail section, well opposed by veteran actor Ed Harris as the evil godlike authoritarian ruler who never leaves the front section of the train he designed.

The chameleon-like Scottish-born actress Tilda Swinton (who was totally unrecognisable in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*), has now gone through the ultimate makeover, changing her appearance dramatically for the film, donning an exaggerated nose and wig for her authoritarian upper-crust Mason character that is an absolute delight.

Korean actors Song Kang-ho and Ko Ah-sung, who played father and daughter in *The Host*, once again play father and daughter in *Snowpiercer*, portraying renegade drug addicts who hold the key to escaping the hermetically sealed train.

## An excellent Korean production

Although Snowpiercer might look like a co-production, with top actors from countries like Korea, the US and the UK, as well as a multinational crew comprising people from across the globe who assembled in the Czech Republic for the film's 72-day shoot, it is an excellent Korean production.

Bong envisioned the Snowpiercer train as if through a microscope, focusing his story on the rear of the train and what its denizens are struggling for in extreme circumstances. Thus, Snowpiercer became an allegory not only for the harsh realities of climate change, but also for the rampant inequalities that define our current global reality.

If you're claustrophobic, be warned, for you are trapped inside the intimate confines of Snowpiercer from start to finish and are mercilessly plunged into the abyss of its suspense and terror.

There are scenes that will blow your mind, like a cleverly orchestrated fight sequence in darkness, and other scenes that will shock, providing a cinematic experience that offers super entertainment and perfect escapism.

You are not only guaranteed to leave the cinema breathless, but will be physically and emotionally drained. It really is one hell of a journey you simply cannot afford to miss.

For more on Snowpiercer and other films opening this week, go to [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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