

SNOWPIERCER: BONG JOON-HO'S JAB AT THE GOD OF THE MACHINE

(The cats are away at Netroots Nation, leaving the meese to play. – Rayne)

A number of film critics have written that Snowpiercer – director Bong Joon-Ho's adaptation of the French dystopic graphic novel, *Le Transperceneige* – is a cinematic allegory of climate change (the new "cli-fi"). Others will call it an allegory of class warfare. The film released in the U.S. on 27 June, reaching only 374 theaters across the country. Thankfully it went to video-on-demand last Friday as it entered its third week in theaters.

The highly limited and unusual method of release belies the film's stunning appearance, its stellar cast, its punchy delivery. It's all of these things and more: gritty, raw, gruesome, action-filled and emotion-tugging. Chris Evans was a surprise, offering restrained yet emotionally exposed work as flawed and resistant Curtis – a far cry from his recent stints as Captain America. Tilda Swinton is her funky finest, and Octavia Spencer is a powerful mother tigress. Korean actors Kang-ho Song and Ah-sung Ko fit perfectly, as do John Hurt and Jamie Bell. Effects are purposeful and not excessive, camera work highly effective, the score clings to the action like a skin.

Snowpiercer is believed to have been dissed on distribution because Bong Joon-Ho insisted on his own cut, resisting Harvey Weinstein's demands that 20 minutes be excised. Given how closely the story reflects Dante's *Inferno*, it's difficult to see how any cuts affecting up to and through any of its gates would allow the movie to work as it does. (Really, Harvey, which of the circles of hell could we do without? Did

you consult with Satan?)

But another reason for the short shrift on distribution may be the film's unacknowledged allegory: *the engine of production continues at all costs*.

This is not the message of class warfare which Le Transperceneige's two books more closely spell out. This is the ugly truth of our current global economy and the descent it makes into a catastrophic climate hell ahead.

The creators of the train ensuring your existence insist you stay where you are, even if you perceive yourself to be at the head of the train. You will be punished if you step out of your assigned place in the works. Resistance is terrorism, and must be eliminated to retain the careful balance necessary to assure production's continuity. You have no privacy, no rights, no value save for your usefulness to the god of the machine.

This film jabs at the global economy's bloated belly, wherein gross domestic product is worshipped, and energy's demands obeyed at the expense of free will and a survivable planet. Bong Joon-Ho's message is far more subtle and important than that of conflict between labor and capital. It's certainly more unsettling to the domestic distribution system which desires a sure, non-threatening blockbuster to continue their offering of profit to the god of productivity.

Spoiler (look away now, I'll put this after the jump):

The end of the movie focuses on only two known survivors of the Snowpiercer's crash: a girl, a boy, and neither are white.

Perhaps this ending, too, demanded by Bong Joon-Ho as part of his director's cut, ensured this film was not offered wide distribution befitting an action/sci-fi film. How unsettling it might be to the masters of the universe to see the heirs of the planet they're bent on

destroying might not be white.

By the way, if you're in Michigan at the end of the month into the first week of August, you can catch Snowpiercer at the annual Traverse City Film Festival. Do see it on the big screen if you can.