

19 September 2005

By: Entertainment News Staff, -



[British-South African Drama TSOTSI Captured the People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival](#)

The movie was awarded at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, as well.

South African-raised director Gavin Hood's TSOTSI captured the People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival, which closed Saturday. The movie also took the audience award and the best new British feature film award last week at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. "That was agony," Hood told reporters, after praising the film's star, Presley Chweneyagae, a first-time film actor. The movie based on the novel by South African writer Athol Fugard, which was shot in a poor township outside Johannesburg, included star-turns by Terry Pheto, Kenneth Nkosi, Mthusi Magano and Zenzo Ngqobe.

"Tsotsi" literally means "thug" or "gangster" in the street language of South Africa's townships and ghettos. "Kwaito" is South Africa's answer to American Hip Hop. - Synopsis - Set amidst the sprawling Johannesburg township of Soweto - where survival is the primary objective - TSOTSI traces six days in the life of a ruthless young gang leader who ends up caring for a baby accidentally kidnapped during a car-jacking. TSOTSI is a gritty and moving portrait of an angry young man living in a state of extreme urban deprivation. His world pumps with the raw energy of "Kwaito music" - the modern beat of the ghetto that reflects his troubled state of mind. The film is a psychological thriller in which the protagonist is compelled to confront his own brutal nature and face the consequences of his actions. It puts a human face on both the victims and the perpetrators of violent crime and is ultimately a story of hope and a triumph of love over rage. TSOTSI has been submitted by South Africa

to represent that country in the foreign language movie category at the Academy Awards, while Finland, which came second at the TIFF People's Choice Award did the same with "Mother of Mine." Last year, 29 films that premiered in Toronto went on to win honors at the Oscars, Golden Globes and/or European festivals. Past audience faves have included Sideways, Ray, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, American Beauty and Hotel Rwanda.

GAVIN HOOD - DIRECTOR After graduating with a degree in law in South Africa, Gavin worked briefly as an actor before heading to the US to study screenwriting and directing at the University of California in LA. Here, in 1993, he won a Diane Thomas Screenwriting Award for his first screenplay, A Reasonable Man. The script was inspired by a case of ritual murder. Judges included Steven Spielberg, Michael Douglas and Kathleen Kennedy. After completing his studies, Gavin returned to South Africa where he got his first writing and directing work making educational dramas for the new Department of Health which was just beginning to feel the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. For his work in educational television, Gavin won one Artes Award (a South African Emmy) and was nominated for another. In 1998 Gavin made his 35mm film directing debut with a 22 minute short called The Storekeeper. The film went on to win thirteen international film festival awards including the Grand Prize at the Melbourne International Film Festival in Australia, which qualified the film for Academy Award consideration in 1998. The Storekeeper paved the way for Gavin's low budget feature debut, A Reasonable Man, which he wrote, directed, co-produced (with Paul Raleigh) and starred in opposite Academy Award nominee Sir Nigel Hawthorne. At the All Africa Film Awards in 2001, Gavin won Best Actor, Best Screenwriter and Best Director. At the 2000 Sundance Film Festival, Gavin was named by Variety as one of their "Ten Directors To Watch." In 2001, Gavin was hired to adapt and direct an epic children's African adventure story based on a novel, In Desert and Wilderness, by Polish Nobel prize-winning author, Henryk Sienkiewicz. One catch: though the film was set in Africa where Gavin grew up, it had to be made in Polish. Grabbing a chance to shoot on Super 35mm Gavin took the job, working with a Polish translator. On release, the film became the highest grossing film

in Poland for the year and won Best of the Fest at the Chicago International Children's Film Festival in 2002. In 2003 Gavin was approached by UK based producer Peter Fudakowski to write a screenplay based on the novel Tsotsi by South Africa's most acclaimed playwright, Athol Fugard. The film was shot in South Africa in late 2004 and has been selected for Official Competition in Toronto and in Edinburgh for 2005.