

**"T**sotsi ('thug') is a classic story with a universal meaning that will stand the test of time. It's a great film that many of us had been waiting – and hoping – to make and although it's set in a sprawling shanty township in Soweto, South Africa, it would have worked just as well anywhere else in the world," enthuses Director of Photography Lance Gewer (*Beat the Drum*).

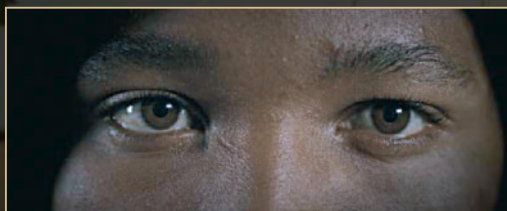
In this powerful story of survival, hope and redemption, set amidst extreme urban deprivation, ruthless young gang leader Tsotsi (played by Presley Chweneyagae) is mercilessly provoked by one of his gang. He beats the aggressor almost to death and, in a panic, flees the township for the safer suburbs. There he shoots a woman outside her home and hijacks her car, but as he races away he hears the cry of a baby from the back seat. Startled, he loses control and crashes. He staggers away from the wreckage and as he turns to look at the screaming baby, an unfamiliar emotion wells up inside him. In a defining moment, he gathers up the infant and returns to the shanty town on foot.

"The script suggested a 16mm handheld gritty shooting style," remarks Director Gavin Hood (*A Reasonable Man*) "but the problem for me was that Fernando Meirelles had used handheld so well in *City of God* that I feared any attempt to do the same would make us look unoriginal and imitative. I wanted a DP who understood that Tsotsi is not so much a gangster story as a very intimate study about a disturbed teenager on the brink of manhood and the emotional and psychological turmoil going on inside his head. The DP had to be someone who was comfortable with less camera movement and who would frame and light so the entire focus of the image was geared to looking almost directly into the actor's eyes. Lance understood this at our first meeting. He has a classical eye and is not afraid to hold an image when what is happening in the frame with the actors is powerful."

"As a director, I generally favour camera moves that are motivated by a character's own movement rather than a need to do something cool with the camera," Hood continues. "I think excessive camera movement in movies is often motivated by a fear of intimacy with the actors and a concern that the audience will become bored if the camera is too static. But in my experience audiences get bored if the story or the actors are boring and no amount of movement helps compensate for bad performances or a dull story. Lance really cared about serving the story and the actors and, when the camera does move, it adds to the emotion of the scene."

Gewer first shot 8mm film on his dad's home camera as a young boy in South Africa. Since graduating from the Pretoria Technikon Film & Television School in 1986, he has freelanced in the South African film and television industries as DP, director, producer, writer and trainer on features, dramas, documentaries, commercials and music videos. "I was well prepared for *Tsotsi*," he states. "I've had to adapt to the changing conditions of filmmaking in South Africa and I was also involved on a technical level with community media for many years."

"Gavin and I have similar opinions about filmmaking and we agreed on a simplistic approach: one that would enable our audience to get into the mind of Tsotsi, our anti hero, and empathise with him although in fact this turned out to be the more challenging and demanding approach to take. We examined the characters from different viewpoints and didn't impose the story on the audience or distract with our technique. The camera remained quite still; in fact our role as filmmakers was similar to a fly on the wall that hardly moved. We adopted a subtle and intimate approach that enabled us to engage with the main characters and develop an emotional line between them."



**Main shot:** DP Lance Gewer setting up smoke lights on the set of the film.

**Below:** (L to R) DP Lance Gewer and Director Gavin Hood setting up a shot.

# Tack Tso



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"In agreement with production designer Emelia Weavind, we limited the colour palette so that everything in the frame would be rapidly absorbed and we could keep the audience's focus on the actors. We lit cinematically, almost like a real life story, with classic cinema lighting rather than a modern clinically cold look. My Gaffer Oliver Wilter and I added 1/4 blue and 1/4 green gel to many different incandescent lamps from 150W Peppers up to 20kW lamps as well as to Kino Flos to produce the clean, warm, focused key light feel of 1940s or 1950s films. Backgrounds are tinged with the green of the fluorescent-lit townships, a tone that represents grunge and potential danger. We also used 18kW and 12kW

# Lighting Tsotsi



HMI's, 6kW and 4kW Cinepars and added 1/2 CTO and 1/8 - 1/4 green 'fluorescent' to them. We kept the skin tones pretty true and natural." During a recee Grewer discovered a neon pink fluorescent and green mix light radiating from a small township butchery. "It's a very subtle and beautiful pink light yet still a little garish, I called it 'butchers pink' and I used it to cut into the harsh world of crime and depression and as a sign of Tsotsi's yearning for what he had lost as a child through AIDs and violence."

In the night scene of Tsotsi running away from the township after the fight, Grewer tracked the running actor on Steadicam with 150w Peppers, Misers and other small lights, from the bar through the shanty town. As Tsotsi runs over a sheet of corrugated iron at the end of an alleyway, the shot dissolves and then resumes with the corrugated iron still in frame, but captured from a 31 foot Maxi Giraffe crane with hothead. The crane-mounted camera continues to focus on Tsotsi as he runs down a hill, through a river, up an embankment and across a large field as lightning strikes, to the more affluent suburbs: a total of 1 2/3 miles. In the film the two shots appear as one continuous scene. Grewer lit huge distances at night, often horizontally along the earth, creating "an illusion of actual light, rather than an illusion of moonlight",

Much of the car hijack interiors were shot static in a country car scrapyard. The crew erected large blackout sheets to block out the

background and recreated the illusion of moonlight, dash lights, headlights and town lights while rocking the car to mimic Tsotsi's get-away and his discovery of the baby on the back seat.

Grewer shot Super 35mm 2.35:1 with a Moviecam Compact and Zeiss Variable Primes, Zeiss f1.3 Primes, a Canon 400m f2.8, and Angeniueux 17-102mm and 25-250mm zoom lenses. Kodak VISION2 100T 5212 was his choice for flashbacks to Tsotsi's childhood. "I needed the contrast of the hardest, coldest tungsten stock for the other softer scenes," he explains. Kodak VISION2 200T 5217 gave a

"colourful, slightly soft and less contrasty look" for daylight exteriors, while Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 was chosen for the numerous night shots. "Megan Gill created dizzying editing patterns and stitched them together seamlessly," notes Grewer. "We used almost 300,000 feet of film and the results are brilliant and utterly consistent. Tsotsi is the first South African film to be graded on Lustré which was done at 2K and this together with the technical skills of Brett Manson gave us amazing control over the final image which was then printed back to Kodak Vision 2283 and Kodak Premiere 2293 film using Kodak lightening for an anamorphic cinema release."

"Lance delivered a beautifully lit and exquisitely framed film," concedes Hood.

"There is a great deal of atmosphere in each shot and the actor's eyes are always hauntingly alive. Lance's work adds enormously to the close connection the audience comes to feel with Tsotsi who, initially, is a character most people do not really relate to at all."



Tsotsi was funded by the UK Film & TV Production

Company PLC, the Industrial Development Corp of South Africa, the National Film & Video Foundation of South Africa and the co-production services of Paul Raleigh of Movieworld. It was screened at CamerImage and has scooped awards at The Toronto International Film Festival, The Edinburgh International Film Festival, Thessaloniki Film Festival, Denver International Film Festival, Cape Town World Cinema Festival, St Louis International Film Festival and Los Angeles AFI Film Festival. Tsotsi is South Africa's second ever Oscar nomination. Recently Tsotsi has also received a Golden Globe nomination and a BAFTA nomination, both for Best Foreign Language Film. ■