



Written by [Eric Egan](#) on November 14, 2010

Unstoppable A Runaway Success

Someone must have forgotten to tell director Tony Scott that the old insult, “You couldn’t direct a train wreck,” was never meant to be a challenge because he decided to try it. The result of that decision is *Unstoppable*, a movie inspired by a real-life runaway train in 2001 and Scott’s second outing on the tracks, his first being *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3*. Scott is in his element with *Unstoppable*. The film is textbook filmmaking with the ante being raised at every hair raising curve.



Meanwhile, further down the line, a veteran engineer by the name of Frank, played by Denzel Washington, and his green trainee, Will, played by Chris Pine, are making their own way down the line at the head of a long line of freight cars of their own. They narrowly escape the path of the unchained locomotive. Much to the chagrin of the company higher ups, Frank and Will decide to unchain their own engine and take it upon themselves to stop the train. What follows is perhaps the most exciting version of *The Little Engine That Could* that has ever been committed to the screen. I even found myself wondering if the decision to make the “good” engine blue wasn’t a homage to the beloved children’s story.

Ethan Suplee plays the bumbling idiot of an engineer who causes the disaster in the first place by leaving the cabin of the slow-moving, half-mile-long behemoth of a freight train, 777, to pull a track switch. His plan to hop back in the cabin to stop the train is hampered by the fact that the throttle slips. An athletic sprinter might have hoped to catch the train, but Suplee can’t move his overweight frame fast enough to hop back on. Unmanned and with its air brakes unconnected, 777 accelerates to 70 miles per hour and barrels toward civilization. The corporation that owns the beast scrambles to concoct a strategy. Oh yeah. A few cars contain highly dangerous and unstable chemicals that would make a train wreck in a populated area highly “inconvenient” for 777’s corporate beast masters.

Scott ratchets up the suspense nob to eleven. According to this [CNN report](#), the incident that inspired the film, while certainly harrowing, was not nearly as hair-raising as its association with Scott’s film might have one believe. In the actual incident, for instance, the train never topped 47 miles per hour. In Scott’s film the train reaches a whopping 70 miles per hour. When the engine in the historical incident was finally boarded, it was traveling a mere 10 or so miles per hour. In the film, all attempts to board



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the runaway train never occur at speeds lower than thirty and always under the threat of something going awry. Of course, the writing ensures that it does. Whenever it seems that the locomotive on the lam is on the cusp of being reined in, someone is too slow, brakes blow, or Murphy's law is generally adhered to. This does, at times, strain believability, but not to the point that the flick is ever derailed by it.

The dialogue is also well written, and Washington and Pine seem to relish their roles as a couple of hard-headed blue collar boys making the best of a bad situation. Their witty back and forth not only makes for some much-appreciated comic relief but also lets the audience in on their lives off the tracks. This, along with local news clips interjecting the narrative, provides a broader context for the action on the tracks and how the impending catastrophe on the rail will effect the characters' lives. The broader context goes a long way in nurturing an emotional connection with Frank and Will that exponentially increases the immediacy of the suspense.

The film is rated PG-13 for sequences of action and peril, and some language and should be appropriate for parents and older teens. The intensity of the more suspenseful moments along with the language means that parents will have to discern the film's appropriateness for younger ones. If Scott's ability to elicit a keeps-you-on-the-edge-of-your-seat reaction is any indication, he may just have a runaway success at the box office on his hands this weekend. For a good time, chug on over to the theater and check out *Unstoppable*.



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