

# Review: Academy Award-nominated 'Society of the Snow' essays a horrific tragedy without sensationalism



CHENNAI: A powerful but incredibly disturbing film, "Society of the Snow" fictionalizes a 1972 Uruguayan plane crash in the Andes mountains. Captured with a sense of urgent passion, the 144-minute work by J.A. Bayona, now screening on Netflix and running for the Best International Feature Film Oscar in March, is certainly not for the faint of heart. It is a brutally honest retelling of an intensely horrific situation in which survival was at stake.

Of the 45 passengers (largely young rugby players) including the crew, some died as the plane nose dived into the icy mountains while others succumbed to hunger and the bitter cold. Based on Uruguayan journalist Pablo Vierci's 2009 book with the same title, the cinematic version has all the drama presented with

cold-blooded intensity. The story has been filmed for the silver screen again and again, but Bayona's work avoids many of the pitfalls of the earlier versions, particularly Frank Marshall's 1993 movie.

As a voice over says, life is impossible, we are an anomaly here. Indeed, we see how Bayona steers his movie towards this premise. His earlier survival film "The Impossible" (about the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami) shows his enormous capability of handling the present disaster. For 71 days, the passengers live on hope and faith braving severe blizzards and avalanches, ultimately resorting to cannibalism driven by gnawing hunger. The director keeps the gory part of chopping the dead away from the camera, just in case you were wondering.

Bayona shows us the kind intense dilemma the survivors went through while making the decision to eat human flesh. Of course, some agreed to give up their bodies in case they died, but what about those already gone? Would it be ethical to desecrate their bodies? Finally, it was decided that starvation was not an option. Actually, when the survivors were rescued — after milder weather allowed Nando Parrado (Agustín Pardella) and Roberto Canessa (Matías Recalt) to hike for 10 days to Chile and get help — a leak about cannibalism caused a furore.

Bayona recreates the crash through awe-inspiring cinematography by Perdro Luque. Against the icy expanse, the mountains rise up in an awesome way and we see tiny people struggling through, barely visible to the naked eye. No wonder, the rescue planes could not spot them even after several sorties. With chilling realism, the narrative makes a splash, albeit without sensationalising the awful tragedy.

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