

Terror in South Africa drives film success

Level 3 | Advanced

1 Key words

carjacking redemption thug abduct
quintessential subsidies clandestine surge (n) affluent
dismantle

1. If something is _____, it is secret and probably illegal.
2. If you _____ someone, you take them away by force.
3. _____ is a crime in which someone attacks the driver of a car and then steals the car.
4. If you _____ a machine, you separate all the parts in it.
5. A _____ is a sudden sharp increase in something.
6. A _____ is a man who is violent, particularly a criminal.
7. _____ is the state of being made free from the power of evil.
8. _____ is another word for 'rich'.
9. If something _____, it becomes weaker or less severe.
10. If something is _____, it is a perfect example of its type.

2 What do you know?

Choose the best answer:

1. When did *apartheid* end in South Africa?
a 1984 b 1994 c 2004
- 2 What is the largest city in South Africa?
a Cape Town b Durban c Johannesburg
- 3 What is the name of the large township south-west of Johannesburg?
a Soweto b Mandela c Evansville
- 4 Which Oscar did the South African film *Tsotsi* win?
a Best film b Best actor c Best foreign language film

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Level 3 | Advanced

Everyday terror in South Africa drives film success

Rain hammers down on a Johannesburg night as a woman pulls up outside a suburban house, steps from her car, the engine running, and rings the bell. A man runs across the street, jumps into the vehicle and begins to reverse. The woman turns around and screams - her baby is in the back seat. She lunges for the driver's door. The thief points his revolver and fires. A bullet enters the mother's belly and she collapses on to the ground. Her car and baby vanish into the night. This is a scene from *Tsotsi* - a South African film that last Sunday won the Oscar for best foreign film - and a rendering of the quintessential South African crime, the carjack.

The film's success has brought international attention to a form of armed robbery that evokes particular dread. Thousands of motorists are ambushed at gunpoint each year in South Africa. The lucky ones are left by the roadside, shaken and without their cars. The unlucky ones are abducted, raped and murdered. Last week staff from the British High Commission attended the National Hijack Prevention Academy, a private course run by former police officers, which advises diplomats and other clients on how to respond if ambushed. 'Business is fantastic, sad to say, because it means there is a need for this sort of course,' according to one of the instructors.

Tsotsi is the story of a young thug from the Johannesburg township of Soweto who finds redemption after kidnapping his carjack victim's baby. It is the latest in a new wave of South African films that explore crime and other contemporary issues rather than apartheid, said Guy Willoughby, a cultural commentator and writer. 'Car hijacking is an especially rich subject. It is the meeting point between the affluent and poor worlds, the exact moment when you are vulnerable and the third world strikes.'

Carjackings peaked at more than 16,000 cases in 1998, prompting one entrepreneur to market a car with a flame-thrower. The annual rate has subsided, with 12,434 reported last year, and commentators say it shows South Africa is maturing and adapting to post-apartheid realities. The middle class was badly shaken by a surge in violent crime that accompanied democracy and the end of apartheid in 1994. 'In the late 1990s, there was so much hysteria, almost a national panic. Hijacking was seen as an existential threat to the middle class,' said Antony Altbeker, a carjacking specialist. 'But now people have come to terms with it more.'

South Africa's largest city, Johannesburg, was once the crime capital of the country but it has experienced a dramatic drop of 35% in the past two years. But for a few days last week hysteria returned when a gunman shot

Terror in South Africa drives film success

Level 3 | Advanced

a pregnant woman twice in the stomach while she was sitting in a car, killing her unborn child. It was then alleged that the incident was faked as a carjacking to cover up what was a murder. The woman's husband was charged with murder for organizing the attack. There is evidence that many carjackings are fronts for other crimes such as murder or insurance fraud. In the latter, owners sell their cars to criminals and then claim they were robbed. When BMW introduced a lie-detector test with its own insurance scheme, the number of claims fell, said Mr Altbeker.

Yet no one disputes that *Tsotsi* shows a real problem. Last Saturday three armed men ambushed the film's director of photography, Lance Gewer, outside his Johannesburg home and made off with his car. The vehicle and Mr Gewer's plane ticket to LA for last Sunday's Academy Awards were recovered hours later. It is thought that 40% of the vehicles stolen are bound for 'chop shops', clandestine sites where parts are dismantled and sold, said Mr Altbeker. Another 30% are re-registered, often with the help of corrupt police or transport ministry officials, and sold in South Africa. The rest, particularly luxury 4x4s, are exported and often end up in eastern Europe.

Carjackings tend to peak on Fridays, when motorists are more relaxed. Some carjackers work alone, others are foot soldiers used by a network of syndicates headed by senior gangsters. A syndicate broken up last year had 22 members, including three junior police officers, who specialized in targeting women drivers for their jewellery. About a fifth of carjacking cases involve physical harm, including rape.

The film's writer and director, Gavin Hood, said that being the first South African film to win an Oscar 'tells me and all of us at home that we can do it'. 'What we want, like everybody else, is just to tell our stories,' said the white South African, insisting that his aim had been not only to depict post-apartheid despair and violence but to tell a universal morality tale. 'This hopefully encourages more South African filmmakers to just keep telling their stories.'

Terror in South Africa drives film success

Level 3 | Advanced

3 Comprehension check

Decide whether these sentences are true or false according to the text:

1. The number of carjackings in South Africa is increasing.
2. Crime in Johannesburg has risen by 35% in the past two years.
3. About a third of the cars stolen in carjackings are exported.
4. People are beginning to be more relaxed about the problem of carjacking.
5. The maker of *Tsotsi* wanted to tell a universal morality tale
6. The main character in *Tsotsi* is a young thug who finds redemption.
7. The film's director of photography didn't go to the Oscar ceremony because he missed his plane.
8. A 'chop shop' is a place where stolen cars are sold.

4 Vocabulary 1: verbs

Match these verbs from the text with their definitions.

prompt
target

mature
allege

fake
ambush

lunge

evoke

1. to move suddenly and with a lot of force in order to catch, hit or avoid something or someone _____
2. to bring an emotion to your mind _____
3. to attack someone after hiding and waiting for them _____
4. to cause something to happen _____
5. to start behaving like an adult and become more sensible as you get older _____
6. to say that something is true or that someone has done something illegal even though this has not been proved _____
7. to pretend that something has happened when it has not _____
8. to intend or try to attack someone _____

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Level 3 | Advanced

5 Vocabulary 2: prepositions

Complete these phrases from the text by using an appropriate preposition. Check your answers in the text.

1. jumps _____ the vehicle
2. collapses _____ the ground
3. ambushed _____ gunpoint
4. the meeting point _____ the affluent and poor worlds
5. South Africa is adapting _____ post-apartheid realities
6. a surge _____ violent crime
7. a threat _____ the middle class
8. charged _____ murder

6 Vocabulary 3: phrasal verbs

Fill the gaps in these sentences using these phrasal verbs from the text.

hammer down pull up cover up make off break up

1. If you _____ something _____, you try to hide the truth about it.
2. If rain _____, it is raining very hard.
3. If you _____ a gang or a group of criminals, you stop them operating.
4. _____ is another phrase for 'escape'.
5. If you _____ when you are driving, it means that you stop.

7 Discussion

Do you agree that violent films should be shown if they depict reality?