



NEW RELEASES

Compartment No. 6

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Train movies are as old as cinema itself; ever since the famous arrival in 1896 of a steam locomotive in the gare de La Ciotat. Of course, the railroad movie gives up the freedom of its vehicular cousin, making its characters passengers rather than drivers, passively along for the ride, as in Wes Anderson's *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), or literally imprisoned, as in Bong Joon Ho's *Snowpiercer* (2014). That sense of claustrophobia makes nonsense of the old advertising injunction to 'Let the train take the strain', but makes trains perfect for James Bond punch-ups, manic *Silver Streak* (1977) capers or Orient Express-style murder mysteries. The clickety-clack of the wheels on the rails can lead to psychosis – see Dennis Hopper in *Tracks* (1976) – just as frequently as they can be a prelude to lovemaking, most outrageously in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959).

The type of journey you have depends very much on whether your travelling companion is Robert Shaw or Eva Marie Saint. To find someone like Lyokha (Yuriy Borisov) in your sleeping compartment for what promises to be a long journey is something of a nightmare. A skinhead with the feral look of a young Robert Carlyle on dirty speed, he's boorish and misogynistic, drinks vodka and smokes so much that even when he's not smoking, he's smoking. He eats sausages and tangerines – scattering peel in the confined space. Unfortunately, such is the situation of Finnish archaeology student Laura (Seidi Haarla) as she heads north on the 1,200-mile journey from Moscow to Murmansk in the Arctic Circle.

To make it worse, the journey is going to take days. Even now it takes a day and a half, but this is the 1990s, in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Laura is learning Russian and in a relationship with an older woman, Irina (Dinara Drukarova). That the relationship is in trouble is obvious from an opening scene in which Irina teases Laura humiliatingly in front of her guests at a party. Irina was supposed to be joining Laura on the trip to see some prehistoric rock carvings at Murmansk, or petroglyphs as she refers to them. The journey has the flavour of a school trip, though one without her teacher/lover, as Irina has backed out. Her insistence that Laura should still go might seem a little too enthusiastic, as if she has a reason to get her partner out of the picture, but Laura hasn't quite clicked.

Armed with a camcorder and a Walkman playing pop songs, Laura braves the Russian rail system, with its long inexplicable stops and surly conductor, its poorly stocked dining car and compartments you can't even bribe yourself out of. In Russia, even corruption isn't reliable. Then there's Lyokha, the knuckleheaded cherry on the shit cake. Yet, as they quarrel and bicker, it becomes apparent that Lyokha is the John Candy to Laura's Steve Martin, and after her initial shock and understandable attempts to escape him, she begins to melt to his charm, energy and humour.

Juho Kuosmanen's first film was the soulful boxing comedy *The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Maki* (2016), which strolled off with first prize in the Un Certain Regard sidebar at Cannes. For his follow-up, Kuosmanen and his co-writers Andris Feldmanis and Livia Ulman have freely adapted Rosa Lixsom's

novel, shifting the action from the 1980s to the 1990s, though as far as train carriages and provincial railway stations go, Russian decades shunt into each other fairly indistinguishably. The production design by regular collaborator Kari Kankaanpää creates a pre-digital, pre-mobile phones world of thuddy 'thingness' – telephone kiosks, jars of preserves and the train itself, with its wonky samovar and stuffy compartments. When Laura and Lyokha squeeze through the packed third-class carriage – a still lower ring of hell – the smell of the feet almost wafts from the screen. Jani-Petteri Passi's unobtrusive handheld camera makes the most of the tungsten oranges and drizzle blues coming in through the train windows. What we see of Russia is largely station platforms or weather.

Yuriy Borisov, who had something of an *annus mirabilis* in 2021 with this, *Captain Volkonogov Escaped* and a supporting role in *Petrov's Flu*, plays Lyokha as a restless jittery young man who hasn't entirely outgrown boyish pranks. At one station, he kills time on the platform trying to karate-kick snowballs. But there's also a wisdom to him. He cuts through Laura's bullshit and when a guitar-strumming Finnish backpacker joins them, his immediate disdain proves to be well deserved. Laura, on the other hand, is all chunky, sensible jumpers and the studied, yet slightly panicked, politeness of the tourist. She has her share of naivety and is clearly in denial about the sliding away of Irina's affections. She's trying so hard to shape and record her life as a young adult that she is in danger of actually missing it. Haarla tracks her journey brilliantly, from her exasperation at having to brush her teeth without water to her exhilaration at finally getting where she wants to go.

Her growing affection for Lyokha is based partly on drinking moonshine and partly on realising a certain kinship. This isn't the talkathon romance of Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* (1995). Lyokha and Laura prefer doing stuff: a stopover with a babushka friend of Lyokha's, a lot of booze and a lot of horseplay. As for erotic charge, the film is quite chaste – one kiss, which doesn't lead to anything. The real consummation of their relationship is a mad snowball fight in the middle of a blizzard. It's almost as if they are a long-lost brother and sister – there's that kinship again – rather than lovers; a strength of the film is that it presents that relationship as something just as precious.

Kuosmanen – in only his second film – has created a rich emotional journey and a witty comic train movie. The humour is rooted in Borisov's and Haarla's note-perfect performances: Lyokha's puzzlement at drinking champagne and not feeling any kick of alcohol, Laura exasperatedly telling Lyokha the Finnish for 'I love you' is 'Go fuck yourself'. Laura and Lyokha may form a connection, but there will be no long-term relationship or yearly reunion. The film is too clear-eyed and smart to fob us off with romantic tosh. Sometimes a snowball fight is better than sex, and a moment of real empathy matters more than some 10,000-year-old rock carvings.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, May 2022

COMPARTMENT NO. 6 (HYTTI NRO 6)

Directed by: Juho Kuosmanen

©: AAMU Film Company, Achtung Panda!, Amrion Productions, CTB Film Production

Production Company: AAMU Film Company

Co-production with: Achtung Panda!,

Amrion Productions, CTB Film Production

in co-production with: Saarländischer Rundfunk

in collaboration with: YLE, ARTE

Funded by: Finnish Film Foundation, Eurimages, Russian Ministry of Culture, Estonian Film Institute, Nordisk Film- och TV-Fond, Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg, Cultural Endowment of Estonia, Creative Europe

Presented by: AAMU Film Company

Written by: Andris Feldmanis, Livia Ulman, Juho Kuosmanen

Russian Dialogues: Ljuba Mulmenko

Based on the novel by: Rosa Liksom

Director of Photography: J-P Passi

Editor: Jussi Rautaniemi

Production Designer: Kari Kankaanpää

Costume Designer: Jaanus Vahtra

Cast

Seidi Haarla (*Laura*)

Yuriy Borisov (*Lyokha*)

Dinara Drukarova (*Irina Mezhinskaya*)

Julia Aug (*Natalia*)

Lidia Kostina (*Lidia*)

Tomi Alatalo (*Sasha*)

Viktor Chuprov (*train waiter*)

Sergey Agafonov (*Sergey*)

Adezhda Kulakova (*Nadia*)

Denis Pyanov (*queue man*)

Polina Aug (*receptionist*)

Finland/Germany/Estonia/Russia/Norway 2021©

108 mins

NEW & RE-RELEASES**The Worst Person in the World (Verdens verste menneske)**

From Mon 28 Mar

Paris, 13th District (Les Olympiades)

From Mon 28 Mar

Hive

From Tue 29 Mar

Cries and Whispers (Viskningar och rop)

From Fri 1 Apr

A Night of Knowing Nothing

From Fri 1 Apr (+ Q&A with director Payal Kapadia on Sun 3 Apr 17:50)

Small Body (Piccolo corpo)

From Fri 8 Apr

Compartment No. 6 (Hytti nro 6)

From Fri 8 Apr

CODA

From Sat 9 Apr

Playground

From Fri 15 Apr (+ Q&A with director Laura Wandel on Thu 21 Apr 18:10)

The Northman

From Fri 22 Apr

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