



The Main Feature

Season 43 – Issue 6 – Screening 23 November 2023

Decision to Leave

South Korea 2022

139 mins. Certificate 15

Director	Park Chan-wook
Screenplay	Park Chan-wook and
Chung Seo-kyung	
Cinematography	Kim Ji-yong
Editing	Kim Sang-beom
Production Design	Ryu Seong-hie
<u>Cast</u>	
Park Hae-il	Det. Jang Hae-jun
Lee Jung-hyun	Jung-an (Hae-jun's wife)
Tang Wei	Song Seo-rae
Yoo Seung-mok	Ki Do-soo (Seo-rae's first husband)
Park Yong-woo	Im Ho-shin (Seo-rae's second husband)
Go Kyung-pyo	Soo-wan (Hae-jun's police partner in Busan)
Jung Young-Sook	Granny Hae Dong ("Monday granny")
Seo Hyun-woo	Sa Cheol-seong ("Slappy")



Tonight's presentation is a critically-adored, stylish mystery thriller from South Korea. The film was directed and co-written by Park Chan-wook, who was awarded Best Director at the 2022 Cannes film festival.

Detective Jang Hae-jun is the youngest inspector in Busan's police department. He suffers chronic insomnia as he can't let go of his unsolved murder cases. His 16-year marriage to nerdy Jung-an is now an affection-free zone. He still heads home each weekend to see her in the misty sea-side town of Ip'o where she works at the nearly nuclear plant. He investigates the death of a retired immigration officer (Ki Do-soo) whose body is found at the foot of a mountain, and interviews the deceased's much younger, beautiful but enigmatic wife, Song Seo-rae. She is a Chinese immigrant, whose Korean language skills are sometimes "insufficient" but who works as a (well-regarded) care worker for seniors. Seo-rae is a suspect, partly as she shows little grief at her husband's demise but also as it emerges that she assisted her mother's suicide, whilst a nurse in China. The sleepless detective conducts nightly surveillance at her apartment and becomes increasingly infatuated. Her alibi holds, and with new evidence suggesting her

husband was involved in corruption, the detective concludes that the officer killed himself. A relationship between the two blossoms but doubts about her innocence re-emerge. The film moves 13 months into the future, when the detective has transferred back to live with his wife in Ip'o but a chance meeting with Song Seo-rae and her new husband (Im Ho-shin) leads to further complications.



The lead actress (Tang Wei) was eulogised by the Guardian as “effortlessly charismatic and mesmeric; sexual but reserved, strong, capable, intimidatingly smart but bearing a poignant and unacknowledged emotional wound.” They liked her! She was previously best known for the Chinese historical spy thriller *Lust, Caution* (2007). The director (Park Chan-wook) made *Oldboy* (2003), *Thirst* (2007) and *The Handmaiden* (2016) – if you have seen any of these (the last was recently aired late night on the BBC) you *may* be relieved to know the violence in *Decision to*

Leave is toned down, the visuals less extreme and the sexual tension suggested rather than played out.

Critics loved the film, with 94% of the 231 reviews collated by Rotten Tomatoes deemed positive. The Hollywood Reporter gushed “a world-class artist at the top of his game...all [done] while navigating multi-layered plots that continue to deliver surprises right up until the end. It's a luxury to put yourself as a viewer in such capable hands.” The Guardian awarded it “Film of the Week”, commenting “sensational...keeps you off-balance at every turn, periodically hitting you with new characters and fresh developments that you have to wait to understand... And in every corner of the detective's life, he finds a variation on a single question: at what point do you decide your marriage isn't working? When do you know that you are in love? What will trigger the decision to leave? It's a gorgeously and grippingly made picture.” The Times praised “an outstanding cop movie with a gasp-inducing ending” and Empire noted “Park's at the top of his game here technically, employing precise editing and audaciously inventive camerawork to pull us into his characters' minds.”

But let's face it, we have all watched critically-adored films that disappoint. The overall score on IMDb at 7.3 (out of 10) is respectable but among the dissenting voices let me quote one vengeful punter “A huge disappointment. The trailer looked exceptionally promising but the film is a colossal and convoluted bore. It's saddled with two leads who have as much chemistry and charisma as Liz Truss and Keir Starmer. The plot nods to both *Basic Instinct* and *Vertigo* but without their audaciousness and verve. Visually sumptuous but overly reliant on tricky use of social media. Occasionally we're 'treated' to a series of revelations meant to wrong foot the audience but all these do are baffle and annoy. I'm a great fan of the director but sadly this interminable and unengaging bore is a misfire on all fronts. By the end, all it induces is stultifying tedium with me not giving a monkey's about the laughable climax.”

A tad harsh! The film is beautifully shot, convincingly acted and uses inventive camerawork to showcase text conversations. That said, it demands full attention to catch subtle clues and recognise the shifting timeline – and to read the subtitles!

But as they say in Korea – bogo dasgeul dalgi (watch and comment!).

Eugene Smith



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Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 29 November 2023
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

Korean Cinema

In the wake of *Parasite*'s success at Cannes and the Oscars in 2020, Peter Bradshaw of the Guardian nominated "more Korean masterpieces" – here are extracts of his "top 10" summaries¹.

10. *Whispering Corridors* (1998/directed by Ki-hyeong Park/cert 18)

A classic of Korean horror which is also a fierce attack on Korean authoritarianism and conformism. In a girls' school, certain teachers are hated and feared for their sadistic discipline and punishments.

9. *The Way Home* (2002/ Lee Jeong-hyang/12)

A lovely, gentle film. A kind of Korean cinema that plucks at the heartstrings and plays the sweetest of tunes but which is nonetheless utterly direct and unsentimental. A small and somewhat stumpy boy is taken to live with his very old and mute grandmother in the countryside way outside the big city.

8. *Snowpiercer* (2013/Bong Joon-ho/18) In English!

Here is one of the most crazily inspired creations, produced by Park Chan-wook — a staggeringly futuristic all-star drama with Chris Evans and Tilda Swinton, about a train with a microcosmic class-based society aboard, hundreds of years into a new Ice Age.

7. *Secret Sunshine* (2007/Lee Chang-dong/15)

An underrated and deeply strange film that touches on a persistent, but little-noticed theme in Korean cinema: Christianity. Jeon Do-yeon plays a woman in her 30s whose son is abducted and killed and, in her anguish, she turns to religion.

6. *Right Now, Wrong Then* (2016/Hong Sang-soo/12)

Amiably talkative, humorously uneventful character stud. This [is a] *Groundhog Day*-type film in which a famous film director

(played by Jung Jae-young) comes to a strange town to attend a screening of one of his films, and meets-cute twice over with a beautiful young woman (played by Kim Min-hee).

5. *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter ... and Spring* (2003/ Kim Ki-duk/18)

A director renowned for his extreme and ultraviolent horror movies. A boy lives under the care of an old monk and is punished for tormenting small animals. Spring turns to summer, the boy grows to manhood and is warned by the elder of submitting to lust.

4. *Poetry* – shown by the Club in May 2017 (2011/Lee Chang-dong/12)

A beautiful and mysterious film. Yun Jung-hie plays Mija, a sixty something grandmother who looks after her troubled teen grandson who lives with her in her modest apartment. She is suffering from the early signs of dementia, and this terrible news inspires her to take classes in poetry.

3. *Oldboy* (2003/ Park Chan-wook/18)

Extreme cinema never got freakier or more extreme than this quite extraordinary revenge horror which went above and beyond anything we had seen before.... Spike Lee's English-language remake was not well judged.

2. *Parasite* – shown by the Club in September 2021 (2019/ Bong Joon-ho/15)

An upstairs-downstairs satirical masterpiece. The film has a crazy and exuberant theatricality, with broad streaks of farce, and also a strong - if unexpected - element of sympathy.

1. *The Handmaiden* (2016/ Park Chan-wook/18)

A glorious erotic suspense thriller, a sumptuously designed period drama based on Sarah Waters's novel *Fingersmith*. It is a classic tale of crime, sex, ambition and love.

Eugene Smith

¹<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/feb/13/classics-of-modern-south-korean-cinema-ranked>

Comments and reactions to: **The Lost King**

No of reaction slips received = 26

Average score = 7.38

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	1	1	3	8	9	3	1

Loved every second of the film

Struggling with sound

I felt the appearance of the 'phantom' rather farcical, but I enjoyed the story

Enjoyed this film so much – excellent acting, so much to commend it

Intriguing and amiable. Great choice

Excellent choice. Bittersweet

Nice story: amazing that it's a true story

Characterisation was horrendous

Good performance by Sally Hawkins. Not sure the ghost of Richard III worked

Really enjoyed it, well done apart from the few artistic liberties. Would like to see all the credits

Great story very well told. I hadn't realised exactly how the discovery had come about - excellent

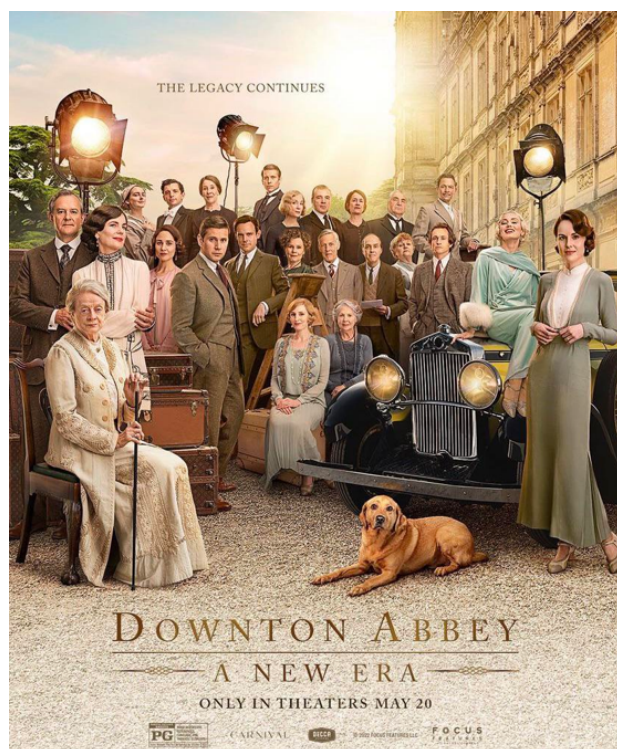
Brought history to life – very well done

The little person outdone by the big business i.e. the University of Leicester

Very enjoyable. The interactions with an imaginary Richard III worked very well. I can see why someone is suing the filmmakers though ...

Position	Film	Average score
1	Mrs Harris Goes to Paris	7.58
2	The Lost King	7.38
3	The Banshees of Inisherin	7.06
4	Rams	6.40
5	Three Colours: Blue	6.18

Forthcoming attraction: 14 December 2023 – **Downton Abbey – A New Era**



Downton Abbey brings out the snob in everyone, but it also confounds the snob in everyone: just when you think you're above it all... someone will show someone else an unexpected kindness, and you're a puddle again. The Times

Unsurprisingly, Dame Maggie Smith is also a true standout here as Violet Crawley puts her affairs in order, offering more laughs, tears and food for thought as her iconic character. Radio Times

A New Era is a misnomer of a title -- not much has changed, which actually may be the best gift to Downton fans. After a tough couple of years, you could do worse than this. Associated Press