

FILM REVIEW

Seoul bearers

After co-directing the 2006 hit comedy 'Like a Virgin,' South Korean Lee Hey-jun shows off strong directorial skills in his solo debut, a clever look into the lives of two social misfits

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FLASH FORWARD ENTERTAINMENT

South Korean writer and director Lee Hey-jun's *Castaway on the Moon* begins with an immediately gripping premise: A would-be suicide becomes a modern-day Robinson Crusoe on a deserted island in the middle of one of the world's most densely populated metropolises. His story then intersects with that of an oddball female shut-in who prefers the confines of her own room to the world outside.

Using little more than these two characters, Lee ingeniously spins an original yarn that is part survivalist adventure and part refreshingly intelligent romantic comedy. Suit-wearing salary man Kim (Jung Jae-young), jobless, in debt, and dumped by his girlfriend, becomes convinced that death is the only way out of his dreary position in life. He jumps off a bridge into Seoul's Han River, but awakens to find himself washed upon the shore of Bam Island, an uninhabited natural sanctuary in the middle of the river.

Unable to swim or attract the attention of potential rescuers, Kim is left with no choice but to stay on the island and learn to feed and shelter himself in isolation, against the backdrop of Seoul's metropolitan skyline.

His new life on the island — one without bosses, credit cards and cell phones — seems to suit Kim and he gradually settles in, learning how to catch fish from the river, planting a vegetable garden and putting the city's flotsam to good use.

Ms Kim (Jung Ryeo-won) hasn't left her bedroom in three years and spends most of her time online or taking photographs of the moon. Then she spots Mr Kim on the island. The two begin a tentative exchange that involves writing words in the sand and sending messages in a bottle — delivered in an amusingly unconventional way. As time goes by, a bizarre romantic relationship develops between the two, begging the question: Can they really find happiness together?

With the Korean title that literally means "Castaway Kims," the film makes observations on the modern way of life through

its portraits of these two misfits. Their social isolation is arrestingly accentuated by background images of Seoul's towering skyscrapers and bright city lights, all so close yet so far away, capturing the essence of modern alienation: The overwhelming loneliness people can feel even while living in such close proximity to each other.

Yet the film's biggest strength lies in its seemingly effortless blending of weighty social commentary with humor and romance. The ample supply of clever lines, physical humor and sparkling fantasy sequences keep the narrative's momentum alive and kicking throughout the film, and Lee's neatly polished script manages to tell a tale of irresistible attraction without drifting into the realm of sappy love stories.

The small but winning cast contributes significantly to the movie's wit and charm. Veteran thespian Jung Jae-young strikes a fine balance between lunacy and despair, and pop singer-turned-actress Jung Ryeo-won also delivers a solid performance, flexing enough acting muscle to propel the story through its second half.

Though the film flounders a bit toward the end with a less-than-original conclusion, director Lee's *Castaway on the Moon* proves that one doesn't have to sacrifice intelligence for the sake of entertainment, or vice versa.

Film Notes

CASTAWAY ON THE MOON

DIRECTED BY:
LEE HEY-JUN

STARRING:
JUNG JAE-YOUNG (MR KIM), JUNG RYEOWON (MS KIM)

LANGUAGE:
IN KOREAN WITH CHINESE SUBTITLES

RUNNING TIME:
116 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

The Last Airbender

Quite apart from its seriously silly title, this latest feature by M. Night Shyamalan begs the question of how he manages to obtain funding. Shyamalan, who burst onto the Hollywood scene as a prodigious and versatile talent in 1999 with *The Sixth Sense* and *Stuart Little*, has done much to alienate audiences (both mainstream and art house) over the past decade, and by all appearances he has surpassed himself with his most recent offering. A fantasy tale based on a popular animated series for children, and upgraded to full 3D treatment, *Airbender* has some good effects. Its cliché-ridden story may still be a hit with the kids, but for anyone who hasn't been living in movie purdah, you've probably seen it all before.



Predators

A new addition to the *Predator* franchise that first hit cinema screens back in 1987 as one of Arnold Schwarzenegger's less-successful action film vehicles, *Predators* does not go much beyond the original concept and now-famous tagline "If it bleeds, we can kill it." A bunch of elite warriors are mysteriously brought to a planet where they, long accustomed to being predators, now become prey and have to dig deep to survive. A solid cast of tough characters is present and correct with the likes of Laurence Fishburne and Danny Trejo. The biggest surprise is Adrien Brody in the leading role.



Nobody to Watch Over Me

A hard-hitting movie about the relentless Japanese media machine and its power to destroy the lives of those it touches. Released in 2008, the film has picked up a Japanese Academy Award (Best Newcomer) for its young star Mirai Shida this year, and won the Best Screenplay Award at the Montreal World Film Festival in 2008. The story deals with a media feeding frenzy over police protection of a 15-year-old girl whose older brother is accused of the brutal murder of a young child. Innocent and guilty get tarred with the same brush as the massive power of Internet news and blogs gears up to demand "justice." An edge-of-your-seat thriller that provides a thoughtful take on the 24/7 news cycle.



Chloe

Atom Egoyan is back with another signature work of love, lust and ambiguity. *Chloe*, a loose remake of a French film titled *Natalie*, explores the idea of trust, and how a desire for truth can destroy love. This is vintage Egoyan territory, and features veterans Julianne Moore and Liam Neeson as Catherine and David Stewart, a would-be perfect couple. Catherine begins to suspect her husband of infidelity and hires an escort to test his loyalty. This is Chloe, played by Amanda Seyfried, who is well out of her comfort zone and loving it. She also turns out to be much more than the Stewarts ever bargained for.



Paper Castles

Also released under the title *3some*, *Paper Castles* is yet another low-rent European sex comedy so much beloved of local art-house distributors. Featuring principals whose distinguishing qualities are good looks and toned bodies, this Spanish film is being flogged in Taiwan with the suggestion that you will get to see these beautiful young things "fully naked." With that as the main marketing ploy, it seems hardly necessary to get involved with the story, so suffice to say that it involves two young art students and a model who get caught up in a love triangle, providing plenty of opportunities for seductive titillation.



Detective Conan: The Lost Ship in the Sky

Based on the hugely popular Japanese manga series *Meitantei Conan*, this is the 14th anime film to chronicle the activities of Jimmy Kudo, a super-intelligent detective who has been transformed into a child because of the effects of a poison. *The Lost Ship in the Sky* has our young bespectacled detective trying to prevent the theft of a new super airliner. The manga, which began in 1994, continues to be serialized and is hugely popular in Taiwan.



FILM REVIEW

Save the last dance

The plot takes a paint-by-numbers approach, but 'StreetDance 3D' knows how to strut its stuff

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

This picture begins with a group of dancers practicing for an upcoming street dance competition. The lead dancer Jay (Ukweli Roach) begs off and hands over responsibility for the dance crew to girlfriend Carly (Nichola Burley). It's a huge challenge just to be in charge, then disaster strikes. They lose their rehearsal space. Will Carly pull through? Will she and Jay get back together? Does the boy from the other side of the tracks have a chance? Will it all end with hugs and high fives all round? It's all pretty much a no-brainer from the very beginning. The real question is: Do you care, or will you just let yourself be carried along on the wave of energy, optimism and good intentions that drives *StreetDance 3D*.

Even for those with little interest in dance, whether that of the street or the concert hall, *StreetDance 3D* has a good chance of carrying you along. There are some splendid dance sequences, and an introduction to various forms of street dance is competently integrated into the film. It is also always enjoyable to watch men and women at the peak of their physical beauty and strength performing movements of amazing athleticism, and it doesn't really matter whether or not you actually like the music.

What dramatic tension there is in *StreetDance 3D* derives from the meeting of Carly's street



Hot to trot.

PHOTO COURTESY OF APRILUSE

dance crew with a bunch of ballet students under the tutelage of Helena (the always fascinating Charlotte Rampling), who hopes to inject more passion into her accomplished but rather wooden dancers by forcing them to adapt to new styles of dance, and of thought. It goes without saying that the two groups get off to a bad start, and it is equally obvious that the leading male ballet dancer Tomas (Richard Winsor) is going to mess with Carly's emotional

world. One of the most exciting sequences is one performed by Winsor in which he mixes up some street moves into contemporary ballet. A number of hugely popular aspiring street dance talents such as Flawless, Diversity and George Sampson, who got their first showing in *Britain's Got Talent*, also feature in the film, giving the dance-offs some of their own personal flair.

Amid all the splendid dancing and lovely young people in trendy

London fashions there is some really quite indifferent acting that is aggravated by a script that is cringe-inducingly clunky. While the music may have rhythm the screenplay does not, and Helena's little homilies on dreaming the dream and fighting the fight for art's sake are the sort of thing that live in the notebook of a copywriter for Hallmark.

Then there is the ridiculous need to make the film 3D. This seems superfluous, partly as the

Film Notes

STREETDANCE 3D

DIRECTED BY:
MAX GIWA AND DANIA PASQUINI

STARRING:
CHARLOTTE RAMPLING (HELENA), NICHOLA BURLEY (CARLY), RACHEL MCDOWALL (ISABELLA), RICHARD WINSOR (TOMAS), PATRICK BALADI (MR HARDING), UKWELI ROACH (JAY), ELEANOR BRON (MADAME FLEURIE)

RUNNING TIME:
98 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY

way we observe dance in the real world is usually as a spectacle in front of us rather than being immersed in the action. A food fight is contrived to give the 3D effects a bit of an airing, but for the most part they are unobtrusive and it is easy enough to forget you are watching a 3D movie, except for the discomfort of the plastic spectacles. All that said, there are far worse ways of passing a couple of hours in the cinema than watching this well-shot and inventively choreographed talent show.