

[The Writing Life](#)

- [Home](#)
- [FAQs](#)
- [The Photo Below](#)
- [Why I Believe in Jesus](#)

[Tak Cukup Malaysian?](#)
[Fighting!](#)

Sunday, February 25th, 2007...12:47 pm

The King and the Clown (2005)

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In the first few minutes of this movie, Jae-saeng; a street clown and the de facto leader of the troupe told Kung-gil, his fellow performer and friend this, "There are things which you shouldn't sell". He was talking about Kung-gil's body. At this frame, the audience would have started to cringe.

Kung-gil was not a male prostitute; he was a clown that would take on feminine roles for the troupe. But, his highly feminine characteristics have pervertedly intrigued a male official who had invited him to his room. And it was not modern-day Korea at the time of the invitation.



Thus, began a controversial discussion of a subject that the conservative Korean society would rather keep in the closet-homosexuality. Not that the movie promoted it; but its toying with the idea was apparent. I would equate this movie to playing with a flicker of flame- it doesn't quite burn, but the tingling sensation is enough to send you the warning signals of danger.

Set during the reign of the infamous King Yeon-San; the movie documented the journeys of two clowns-Jae-saeng, a man of brute and strength; perhaps stereotyped as the template of a Korean man, and Kung-gil; a man, yet of questionable feminine elegance and sensitivity. He even had a slim figure and white porcelaine skin to prove the point.

Their talents and determination to be successful street performers would earn them an unwanted invitation to the palace where King Yeon-San lived. King Yeon-San was known to be the king of excess. He had many wives and consorts, but they were not enough to make him happy, least smile a little.

Yet, Kong-gil stole the limelight and eventually the heart of the King through his soft-spoken beauty and mannerism. The King's infatuation with a male performer sent shockwaves to his noblemen. He even stopped seeing his favourite concubine and sent for Kong-gil to amuse him every night.

But, what was mere infatuation turned to be deadly. The King became strangely possessive and obsessive of Kung-gil and would kill anyone who turned against his favourite clown. Every night of performing became a bloodbath. Yet, commoners had no power to turn down invitations by the King to perform. The troupe was forced to witness the King's ruthless killings after each performance and Kung-gil was forced to put on a mask of bravery when brought before the King for his nightly puppetry performance.

The fatal attraction that the King had for Kung-gil and the mutual affections between Jae-saeng and Kung-gil are highly debatable, even strange sometimes. Yet, the way that Director Lee Jun-Ik put these emotions in such a subtle mood whereby the audience would have to draw the lines themselves, is noteworthy.

The entire cast, though not a star-studded one; has won praises from critics and viewers alike. With such effective performances of Jeong Jin-young as the tormented King and Lee Jun-Ki as the fragile and helpless-looking Kung-gil, it is no surprise that this movie has won 7

awards including Best Actor, Best Director and Best Film and was a contender in the Academy Awards as Best Foreign Language Film.

The King and the Clown is not an exceptionally good Korean film, as the Korean film industry; though not without its problems, is a highly competitive one. But, it is brilliant and has soared beyond the expectations of many who are cynical of period movies with low budgets, especially one with such a big story to tell.

In the end, a good story does sell and the myth that South Korean actors are all plastic surgery beauty and no talent is debunked. But, only if we shall leave our prejudices against the Korean Wave at the door.

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[Owen](#)

February 25th, 2007 at 1:09 pm

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