

## HEROIC CINEMA

The guide to Asian movies in Australia

[Home](#)   [Reviews](#)   [Forum](#)   [Reports](#)   [Articles](#)   [Links](#)   [Contact](#)

## SEARCH REVIEWS

Go!

## CINEMAS

[Chinatown \(VIC\)](#)  
[Market City \(NSW\)](#)

## TELEVISION

[SBS /](#)  
[World Movies /](#)

## DVD RELEASES

[new releases /](#)  
[all, by distributor /](#)

## GIVEAWAYS

Tokyo Drifter  
competition

We have 5 copies of the Tokyo Drifter to give away!

[MORE](#)
Tetsuo Iron  
Man/Body Hammer  
competition

We have 5 copies of the Tetsuo double pack to give away!

[MORE](#)

## Recent Reviews

- [Ashes of Time](#)
- [The King and the Clown](#)
- [The Soong Sisters](#)
- [The 47 Ronin](#)
- [Rumbling Hearts](#)
- [The Bird People in China](#)
- [Tetsuo: Iron Man](#)

## The King and the Clown



## Film Info

**Year:** 2005  
**Country:** South Korea  
**Director:** Jun-ik Lee  
**Cast:** KAM Woo-seong, JEONG Jin-yeong, LEE Jun-gi, KANG Seong-yeon

**Running time:** 119 min  
**Language:** Korean with English subtitles

Not available in Australia, to our knowledge. Click the logo to the right to [search for this title on YesAsia](#).



## Synopsis:

During the reign of infamous King Yeon-San, two performing clowns produce a satirical play criticising the country's ruler. While this makes them highly popular amongst the common people, it gets them into a world of trouble with the authorities. The two are shortly arrested and accused of treason, a crime that carries the death penalty. The clowns then make a deal with the King - if they can make him laugh with their play-acting, he will spare them.

## Review:

It's no coincidence that in the IMDB entry for this film you will probably see, in the list of recommendations for similar titles you might enjoy, a copy of Branagh's *Hamlet*. With a great deal of reference to the political machinations of the noble classes, to madness and to the idea that both circumstance and fate conspire hand in hand, *The King and the Clown* reads a lot like a Shakespearean tragedy.

It also reads a little like *Thelma and Louise* for boys. Jang-sang (Woo-seong Kam) and Gong-gil (Jun-gi Lee) are two members in a travelling troop of performers; by day they strut their stuff with great affection for their art, for the entertainment of the peasant and noble alike. By night, the troop performs a slightly seedier service - pimping out the attractive, androgynous Gong-gil to interested local lords for 'private performances', something that Jang-sang, for whatever moral, ethical or personal reason, is decidedly not happy about. Being the rash, manly type, he cracks one evening and finally takes it upon himself to rescue his buddy - the sweet, girly type - and spirit him away for good. It doesn't go quite according to plan however, and so the two friends find themselves rushing to the anonymity of the capital, busting their superior moves all over the local jokers, and shortly thereafter, conceiving of a satirical play that just happens to target the wealthiest of them all - the King.

Now, you'd think considering the track record here, Jang-sang would want to keep Gong-gil away from the rich and powerful at all costs, rather than take him right to them. Of course, if he did that, we wouldn't have a movie, so perhaps I shouldn't complain that Jang-sang could have put just a little more forethought into what he was doing. He seems motivated by working class outrage, but whether it's for Gong-gil's sake or his own is a little unclear. Either way, the higher the status, the higher the risk; when Gong-gil inevitably attracts the attentions of the King, he is at no more (and perhaps even less) liberty to refuse than he was before, and so no better off. By then, however, the friends are too deeply involved in a situation from which they cannot extricate themselves. Up close and personal, the King, whom they satirised so easily, becomes humanised. In reality, he is a trapped and isolated figure, one with whom Gong-gil's gentle heart can sympathise even as Jang-sang's desire for freedom perhaps relates. As events degrade further into lethal madness, the friends find themselves at unspoken odds, unable to see eye to eye and yet unable to let each other go.

The subversive nature of this dynamic - the feelings and emotional conflict between



## Heroic Buddies



[and Body Hammer](#)

- [Battle of Wits](#)
- [Hard Luck Hero](#)
- [Bleach](#)

 [Reviews RSS feed](#)

Jang-sang and Gong-gil implied rather than made explicit - is an intrinsic element of the film and it carries a heavy emotional charge. Jang-sang and Gong-gil's friendship appears platonic; they obviously understand and care about each other and the rapport between them makes sense of their actions and decisions later. But then again, that same rapport also has it's down-side - frustration, obsession; Jang-sang sulks when Gong-gil seems to prefer the King's company to his, and Gong-gil pines when Jang-sang isn't around. It's easy, and I'd argue expected, that you read into this relationship something more or less in denial, but by deliberately avoiding anything blatant, provocative (and potentially confrontational) between them, the script intensifies their emotional connection and ultimately the viewer's investment in their friendship. And when you're talking tragedy in the Shakespearean sense of the word, intense is exactly what you want.

In direct opposition to the main characters' ambiguous relationship and unspoken feelings, King Yeonsan (Jin-yeong Jeong) and his sweetly conniving concubine Nok-su Jang (Seong-yeon Kang) are a bit of a breath of fresh air. At least they know what they want and actually have the wherewithal to try and get it. Both performances are superb, but Jeong is particularly note-worthy as the tormented, childish and increasingly unhinged King. The play commissioned for dinner that goes horribly, heartbreakingly wrong (or perhaps perfectly right, if you're Yeonsan) is probably where the parallels to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be most strongly drawn but *The King and the Clown* clearly stands on the merits of its own tragic trajectory.

Considering that not only was the film selected as the official Korean entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 79th Academy Awards, won a host of awards at the Dae Jong (Best Film, Best Director, Best Script, Best Actor and Best New Actor, just to name a few), and broke the box-office records for any Korean domestic film ever in 2006, it's perhaps no surprise that it's described as an 'unexpected hit'. The only surprise is that with the high caliber of acting, direction, script (the poems and plays enacted by Kam and Lee are utterly delightful), music and production it so obviously displays, the success of *The King and the Clown*, both domestically and internationally, was ever unexpected in the first place.

9 Emotional High Wires out of 10

by [Deni Stoner](#)

[back to the top](#)

#### DVD Releases

No current Australian DVD releases.

[review archive](#)