

Film Review: Kim Ki-duk's Pitch Black Morality Play of 'Pieta'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 15, 2013 - 10:58am

- [Bong Joon-ho](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Park Chan-Wook](#) [5]

CHICAGO – Korean cineastes know the name Kim Ki-duk. While Park Chan-wook (“Oldboy,” “Stoker”) and Bong Joon-ho (“The Host,” “Mother”) may get more international attention, anyone who has seen “3-Iron” or “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring” knows that Kim is an important international filmmaker. While his recent output hasn’t been as well-received as those early ‘00s arthouse hits, “Pieta,” opening in some markets this Friday and now playing On Demand, is a return to form.



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

Winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival last year (the first time a Korean film did that) and winner of the Korean Association of Film Critics prizes for Best Film, Best Director, and Best Actress, “Pieta” is almost a major film. It starts off more promisingly than it finishes as the final act feels a bit too familiar to fans of Korean cinema’s obsession with vengeance but there is no denying Kim’s ability to drag the viewer into those dark places of humanity that we don’t want to go. It’s not an easy film but it’s a worthwhile one.



[Read Brian Tallerico's full review of "Pieta" in our reviews section.](#) [6]

Lee Kang-do (Lee Jung-jin) is a heartless, impassionate enforcer for the Korean mafia. His job is to not just to go collect on past dues but to do so in brutal, violent ways. You can’t pay the ridiculous mark-up that turns a \$3,000 loan into a \$30,000 debt? Well, Lee is the man who will cripple you. And he will do so in front of your mom after beating your wife and laughing at your tears. He’s a terrifying unemotional creation as Kim gives us several scenes of increasing brutality with begging, pitiable victims being given the same treatment by Lee, who only argues that they are accepting the fate that they deserve for taking money they couldn’t repay. They took the money, it’s his job to cripple them. It’s just a business transaction. Of course, it’s not JUST a business transaction when you ruin people’s lives in ways that not only force them out of the work force but unable to take care of loved ones or maintain their sanity. (There’s a clear criticism of capitalism not so far under the surface of this story of a business-minded madman.)

Lee’s life is turned upside down when a mysterious woman shows up at his door. She’s been following him around, lurking in the shadows, almost like a religious figure come to intervene. The woman, Jang Mi-sun (Jo Min-su) tells Lee that she’s the mother who gave him up years ago. At first, Lee completely dismisses Jang, trying hard to push her away by allowing her to tag along on a few violent jobs and even pushing the incestuous envelope (a scene where he offers to go back in from where he came is one of the most memorably disturbing of the year to date). After Jang seems to pass Lee’s tests – she’s not going anywhere – he lets down his guard and promptly begins to make mistakes on the job. It’s as if Kim is suggesting that even the briefest hint of humanity in this monster makes him a less effective enforcer. And then “Pieta” really turns on its head in the final act as even more secrets are revealed.



[Continue reading for Brian Tallerico's full "Pieta" review.](#) [6]

“Pieta” stars Lee Jung-jin and Jo Min-su. It was written and directed by Kim Ki-duk. It opens in some markets, including Chicago, on May 17, 2013, and it’s now available On Demand.



Pieta

Photo credit: Drafthouse Films

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- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/22104/kim-ki-duk-s-pitch-black-morality-play-of-pieta>