



fish

*Decision to Leave*  
(South Korea 2022)

**Spoiler alert: You may prefer to read this review after the screening**

DIRECTOR : Park Chan-Wook

RUNNING TIME : 138 mins

RATING :

**Synopsis:**

Director Park Chan-wook's tale of a married detective torn between infidelity and moral duty as he struggles with an unsolved murder case.

**Review: Peter Bradshaw**

Korean director Park Chan-wook was once the master of gonzo revenge violence but with the adaptation of the Sarah Waters novel *The Handmaid* in 2016 he pivoted with flair to the elegantly designed suspense thriller. And it is in this spirit that he's back in Cannes [2022] with this sensational black-widow noir romance, featuring a glorious leading turn from the Chinese star Tang Wei, who has bettered her iconic performance in Ang Lee's 2007 spy drama *Lust, Caution*. She is effortlessly charismatic and (that overworked word) mesmeric; sexual but reserved, strong, capable, intimidatingly smart but bearing a poignant and unacknowledged emotional wound. And the intelligence and live-wire energy she brings to her relationship with the film's leading man, Park Hae-il, is a marvel.

The tension and the intrigue, the grandstanding emotional confrontations, the ingenious use of mobile phone technology (which so often stymies modern-day thrillers), the stylish set pieces, including a fantastic rooftop chase, and the deliciously manipulative plot twists are very Hitchcockian in their way. But the style is not pastiche, which is the way that idea usually arises; this is the kind of Hitchcockian film made by someone who hasn't necessarily seen a Hitchcock film before.

The setting is Busan where a cop called Hae-Joon is struggling with an unsolved murder case featuring a couple of known hoodlum suspects, one of whom resists arrest and gets a ferocious beating from Hae-Joon who then thoughtfully comments that this guy was not tough enough to be the villain he's looking for.

Cont.

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FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2023

8.15 pm Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023

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## Review: Cont.

Hae-Joon is sort-of-happily married to Jung-an (Lee Jung-hyun), but he's longing for the cigarettes she won't let him smoke and is suffering from insomnia, which means that he takes surveillance and stake-out jobs because he can't sleep anyway. Then a puzzling new case electrifies him. The smashed body of a climber is found at the foot of a well-known climbing rock. Did he fall? Did he take his own life? Or did someone push him?

On the man's mobile phone the police find sinister photos of a woman's beaten and bruised body. And his beautiful wife, Seo-rae (Tang Wei), instantly captivates Hae-Joon with her dignity and reserve. She is a caregiver who is loved by the old people she tends to, and the Korean patriot in Hae-jun is moved by her personal story: Seo-rae came to Korea as an illegal, passionate about Korea as the homeland of her grandfather who was a soldier in the nation's defence against Japan in the 1930s. Seo-rae has an alibi for the time of death, but as the circumstantial evidence mounts against her, Hae-Joon begins to fall deeply in love with this woman, who appears also to be falling for him, her protector.

Is Hae-Joon going to cover up for Seo-rae? Is she all that she appears to be? Well, audiences might think they broadly know the answers to both those questions, but the script by Park and Chung Seo-Kyung keeps you off-balance at every turn, periodically hitting you with new characters and fresh developments that you have to wait to understand. But each new scene had me propped further forward on my seat – further still for the second and then the third act – and Cho Young-Wuk's musical score forthrightly ratchets up the fear. 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 and Tang Wei is magnificent.

Source: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) ~ Peter Bradshaw 21/10/22 Edited extracts accessed 18/7/23

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## COMING UP

December                      *My Old School* [UK]                      Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup>

February 2024                      *Alcarras* [Spain]                      Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>

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## **Some Thoughts on: *The Blue Caftan***

This beautiful movie would have to rank among some of the best I have seen. I cannot imagine any other medium being able to tell such a story with this delicacy, tenderness and insight. In other words, this film truly was a piece of moving visual art.

It is apparent at once that Mina is ill and that she is prickly, possibly towards her husband, certainly towards the young apprentice and to the Dickensian-type vignettes of the various demanding customers. But perhaps also because of the doom-like sense that the beautiful artistry of the maalam, her husband, is not only no longer appreciated but is positively rejected by modern culture. She fights for him and his craft and will not allow her customers to demand that he hurry, even if that means that they go elsewhere for their garments. From the start, even before it is made, the blue kaftan is going to signify the height of that craft, and the long, loving camera shots of the fabric, the golden thread, each gradual addition to the braid, the arrival of the buttons – all of this is a celebration of the maalam. The film itself mirrors the slowness and the patience required for its completion but all the time, nuances of relationship are being added to the story.

Is it the spreading of Mina's cancer that opens her up to giving her blessing to Halim and Youssef? Or was it Halim's grieving apology to her for being unable to "suppress" himself and for enabling the possibility of bringing shame upon her, of "soiling" her – grieving, because Mina is now dying, but also because of the guilt for his feelings for Youssef? Either way, that beautiful following scene where she allegorically gives him her blessing, telling him that he is the purest man she knows and that he is noble, recalled for me that seminal scene in *The Crucible* where Elizabeth says of John, he has his goodness now. Finally, she tells the men that they both smell like camels and they must both go to the hamam. A final blessing from her – plus the adjunct to her husband not "to be afraid to love".

OF COURSE the blue caftan had to go to her. What a beautiful, fitting use for it – to clothe her dead body. The dignity of that funeral march through the town, only the two men carrying Mina with pride, with grief, with nobility – the only time in the film where music became an important, emotional component of the whole thing.

I loved this film. I thought it close to perfect. Thank you to whoever chose it and to the whole Fish committee for bringing it to us. And as always, to the team at the Empire Theatre.

## **Trish Topp**

\* Many thanks to guest reviewer Trish Topp for assisting in the absence of Ross Armfield [Ed.]

## Message from the President

The films we choose are not (generally speaking) box office hits. We are aware that those we favour are made for a purpose: often to make others aware of a situation, or a point of view. So we regularly take risks in our choices. We try to challenge our comfortable views on life, to cause us to query our own perceptions and to research the lives of others. We welcome your ideas on our choices.

May I remind you that our membership entitles us to one viewing per film (no matter how engaging!). We are not prescriptive as to whether you are Sunday or Tuesday people, but we must have enough seats per session.

A last reminder: Please be aware that our year is the financial one, not the calendar year. We are each entitled to one visitor per year, 24 hours warning in advance to our Contact, Deborah Blay. Details below.

**Roz Garwen**

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