

and bring the forces of the gods behind him, and Bigeumsun, a mysterious white-haired hermit sorceress who makes creepy, mystical appearances to predict the future to Jumong and Kumwa.

In Jumong's many misadventures, he meets his first wife, Yesoya, a delicate girl who eventually gives up everything for the sake of the new kingdom. He also meets three thieves — sullen Oi, strongman Hyupbo and fast-talker Mari, who become his fast friends and faithful followers, along with the three rebel fighters Jaesa, Mukgoh and Mugol. These six men become the core of his fighting band and his highest advisors. They are joined by such varied followers as a highwayman, a pirate band, King Kumwa's court weapons expert Mopalmo, and Bubonno, an assassin sent by Prince Daeso, along with many others, thief and noble alike.

No one seems able to withstand the charisma of Jumong. In some ways, this becomes tiresome. Even when Jumong, through arrogance, inadvertence or plain foolishness, causes irreparable harm to someone, he is always forgiven and even worshipped. After awhile, the viewer can't help but sympathize with Prince Daeso's incoherent fury at the inexplicable love of all people for Jumong. It would be a terrible burden for even the most level-headed person, let alone an arrogant, dangerous lunatic like Daeso.

The cast is huge and the players (too many to list here) are excellent for the most part. Haemosu is played rather woodenly by Joonho Huh, but this seems to fit the character. As Kumwa, Kwangryul Jun shows sensitivity and worlds of feeling with a mere look, and as Yuwaha, Yeon-su Oh is luminously unattainable. (Her last words to Kumwa — “You poor

man” — are a master class in understatement.) Unfortunately, Mi-ri Gyeon is pretty much wasted as a vicious, shrill Queen Won, but she does an affecting job with what little meat she is given, late in the drama. The amazing character and theater actor Geunhyung Park plays Kumwa's father, old King Haeburu, and a leading character in the story is the Puyo prime minister, played ably and frighteningly by Jae-yong Lee.

As for the younger players, Ilkook Song as Jumong has a hard road to walk, being cast as a saint and all. Although he won an award for his portrayal and is superior as an oblivious, callow youth, he seems unable to carry the full emotional weight of the later, more mature Jumong. He seems always like a little boy who deepened his voice on purpose to sound like grandpa. Fortunately, the supporting actors are skillful enough to carry the action without

obliterating Song's efforts to play the character. As Sosuhno, Hyejin Han is perfectly cast as a compelling heroine, as is Ji-hyo Song as the quiet, intense Yesoya. Ki-joon Won's Prince Youngpo seems somewhat overplayed at first, but ultimately he settles into a character with believable underpinnings and emotional justification for his foolish actions; every thought Youngpo has parades across his face (with clowns) — a joy to watch. A pleasant surprise was Seun-soo Kim as Prince Daeso, who up to this time has played light leading men. He hits every beat of Daeso's self-destruction with wit, care and power, even though the character ultimately defeats the actor — his insanity becomes boring.

The less said about the soundtrack the better. With some exceptions, it is eminently forgettable, inserted into the action ineptly and at random. Another weakness in the

official MBC DVD release is the sometimes jarring translation. It hardly seems likely that a technically-minded writer like Wan-kyu Choi would put such completely modern expressions as “Listen up!” (instead of, say, “Hear me!”) and “He set you up” (instead of, “He betrayed you”) into the mouths of kings and princes, but the translator sees fit to do so. These and other inappropriate expressions can be jarring. Also, there is some unskillful scene cutting and pacing.

The drama *Jumong* lives in the land of the fairytale, where broken birthrights and inherited evil cannot be averted. It is a story of the truth of one side versus the truth of the other side, and of saintliness and evil, pain and joy, birthright and legacy. Overall, *Jumong* succeeds in presenting these dichotomies. For all its flaws, it is an interesting and well-presented drama. ●