

# Double vision

*Strong leads carry doppelganger plot in romance drama*

***What Planet Are You From?***  
(*Neon Byeoleseo Wassni?*)  
(2006)  
MBC drama, 16 episodes

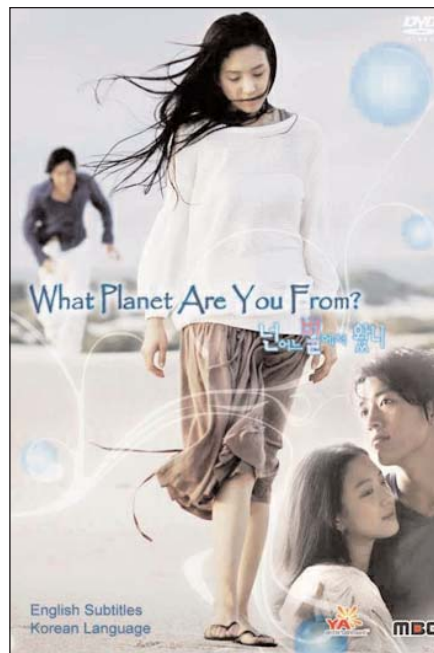
Review by Lorraine Murray

***What Planet Are You From?***, also known as *What's Your Star?* (and other variations), returns the always-charming actor Rae-won Kim to a grateful drama audience. Made famous in a somewhat similar role in *Rooftop Room Cat* (2003), Kim is back in form as a likeable, floppy-haired and at times goofy boy-man, but this time the character he portrays, hotshot young filmmaker Seung-hee Choi, is more sober and mature.

Having turned his back on his art after the tragic loss of his fiancée, for whose death he feels responsible, Seung-hee has spent several years lost and wandering as he looks for a reason to return to life. He finds himself in the remote and mountainous province of Kangwon-do, where it seems he is back into the old habit of scouting locations for filming. He can hardly believe his eyes when he spots a local girl who is the spitting image of his lost love, Hye-soo. Eager to earn some money, she pretends that she and her mother run a home-stay hostel for travelers, and he spends a couple of nights in their shack in the hills, among the bugs and hanging strings of dried herbs in their storeroom.

Doppelganger sightings are run-of-the-mill in Korean dramas, and they usually signal the reappearance of a person who was only assumed to be dead. It is clear in this case, though, that Bok-shil Kim (Ryo-won Jung) is not Hye-soo (also played, in flashback, by Jung); the circumstances of the latter's death were unmistakable. The explanation of the resemblance in this case is an unusual one that is so tied up with the progress of the plot that it would be unfair to reveal it. And Bok-shil is as different from Hye-soo as a country girl could be from a sophisticated classical musician. Jung, a new actress on the television drama scene, brings an unusual sensibility to her role that matches Kim's (Seung-hee's) offbeat and teasing style of courtship.

Bok-shil, a true bumpkin (but a bumpkin with big dreams), was brought up by a poor, mentally challenged single mother. In this role, Jung raises many laughs, most often by her funny facial expressions, her silly pigtailed hairstyle (which she thinks is beautiful and calls "The Seagull"), and her extremely fresh and unpretentious manners. The circumstances of her family life are also amusing; keeping in mind that siblings in Korean families usually have names that share a common syllable, it is quite humorous that Bok-shil, an only child, shares her mother's affections with a couple of goat-siblings who also have "Bok-" names.



*What Planet are you From?* now available from YA Entertainment.

Seung-hee is at first impatient, and then delighted, with this "hillbilly." Flabbergasted at the resemblance between her and Hye-soo, he is drawn to her and soon comes to love her for herself.

The talent of Rae-won Kim, which once seemed to be have a lot to do with his good looks and natural affability, has matured in the last few years, and he has reached a level at which he almost goes beyond the requirements of K-drama. In *What Planet Are You From?*, Kim creates a fully three-dimensional character, showing vulnerability that can bring viewers to tears. He is also extremely funny, the kind of funny that

comes from the character rather than individual lines or jokes.

Although the meeting of the main characters and the background story that is later revealed can be called "high-concept," there is nothing unrealistic in the development of the love story, which remains utterly believable on an interpersonal level. The two characters come to love each other because of who they are and what they see in each other, qualities that are also evident to viewers. Too many Korean dramas rely on love stories that are meant to be earth-shattering

and predestined but give no evidence as to what the two people actually see in each other; too often, it seems physical proximity or simply "they love each other because we [the scriptwriters] say so" stands in for character development.

*What Planet* is only 16 episodes long, but it is filled with so much getting-to-know-you dialogue and shared experience that it is easy to see that Seung-hee and Bok-shil were made for each other, and why, when all is said and done, they simply cannot do without each other. Their romantic relationship is lightened by a brother-sister dynamic; Bok-shil can be just like an annoying little sister,

and Seung-hee can be equally irritating as a patronizing big brother.

Although the progress of the romance is rocky and melodramatic, with obstacles that threaten at several points to be insurmountable, *What Planet* is, overall, a light, entertaining drama. The supporting cast is serviceable but tends to recede into the background, though that is mostly because the relationship between the two principals is so absorbing. There is the usual assortment of secondary love interests, best friends, and comical business associates. Bo-hee Lee is particularly good as the mother of the late Hye-soo. She has a lot to do in this story because of her ongoing, active hatred for Seung-hee, whom she continues to hold responsible for her precious daughter's death.

Also notable is Young-ha Lee as Seung-hee's aging—or, more precisely, aged-playboy father, who sports ridiculous youthful affectations like an ever-changing streak of color in his hair (green, red, etc.) and a succession of shallow relationships with younger women. He contributes nothing of value to his son's life, but his immature character provides an interesting contrast with that of his increasingly mature and responsible son.

*What Planet Are You From?* is highly recommended as funny and touching, well-acted entertainment that walks the line between comedy and drama. ●