

301/302: Food for Thought

Director: Chul-soo Park
Starring: Eun-Jin Bang, Sin-Hye Hwang and Chu-Ryun Kim
98 minutes
1997
Not Rated
(with English subtitles)

301/302, winner of Korea's Grand Bell Prize, is the first Korean film to be widely distributed in the U.S. Available at Blockbuster, you can get some Korean film culture right in your own living room. It's a mix of traditional Korean culture and some indie film influence.

301/302 refers to two women in adjacent apartments. They are never referred to by any name except these numbers. 301 (Eun-Jin Bang) is a recent divorcee, a woman intent on starting a new life in her newly refurbished apartment. 302 (Sin-Hye Hwang) is a reclusive writer, a woman who relishes her independence and her private, spacious apartment. Both women have eating disorders: 301 loves to cook and eat her delicious



creations, and 302 can barely look at food without running to the toilet to vomit. 301 is persistent about sharing her meals with 302, and can't understand why her hospitality isn't reciprocated.

Through a series of bizarre and sometimes disturbing flashbacks, we learn the origins of the women's unhealthy attitudes toward food. While it's refreshing to see two independent, self-confident single Korean women on the big screen, we learn that there are ugly, abusive relationships with men in their pasts.

302 grew up serving her meat butcher parents: a mother obsessed with money and a father who abused her. 301 also lived a life of servitude, although in this case for the purpose of meeting her husband's needs. She tried in vain to please him with her culinary creations, asking over and over at each meal, "Do you like it? Does it taste good? Doesn't it smell delicious?"

Here 301 fits the stereotype of the submissive Asian wife, with her identity and self-esteem derived

only from her husband. It's easy to understand her husband's annoyance at her constant need for affirmation. Perhaps for this reason we do not

blame him for rejecting her toiled-over meals. We can even forgive him for seeking solace with Chong-Chong, the adorable family dog. In funny, but also horrifying scenes, we see this marriage deteriorate. As a result of her husband's rejection, 301 packs on the pounds, using food as her consolation prize. Eun-Jin Bang is pathetically hilarious as her face (but somehow not her body) becomes heavier and heavier in each scene.

Flash forward to the present, and we can understand why it is so important to 301 that 302 eats her

cooking. 301 takes 302's rejection personally, and makes it her goal to feed her healthy, tasty, and beautiful foods. While 301 is a funny but unsympathetic character, 302 is a sad victim, one who desperately needs help, but unfortunately not from her aggressive neighbor. The film would have been more interesting had it delved more into 302's character. Instead, she disappears, leaving 301 and police investigators to solve the mystery of her whereabouts.

301/302 shows delectable Korean foods that will make your mouth water, but also contains some disturbing scenes that are not so tasteful. This is definitely not family fare; the scenes of abuse and the violent ending will upset even many mature audience members. While the film is an interesting window into two Korean women's lives, the bizarre plot twists leave the viewer with an unsettling, unsatisfied feeling. ●