



Bong Joon Ho: Power and Paradox

# Memories of Murder

**Memories of Murder** Salineui-chueok

Director: Bong Joon Ho

©: Sidus Corporation

Production Company: Sidus Corporation

Presented by: CJ Entertainment

Presented in association with: Muhan Investments,

iPictures, Sidus Corporation,

Discovery Venture Capital

International Sales: CJ Entertainment \*

Executive Producer: Lee Kang-bok

Producer: Kim Moo-ryung

Assistant Producers: Lee Hyuk-jae, Lee Yong-ju,

Jung Young-a, Baek Chul-hyun

Co-producers: Choi Jae-won, Cha Seung-chaе,

Jung Hung-kyun, Noh Jong-Yun

Production Manager: Kim Chul-young

Assistant Director: Han Sung-keun

Screenplay: Bong Joon Ho, Shim Sung-bo

Based on the story 'Nal borer Wayo' by:

Kim Kwang-rim

Director of Photography: Kim Hyoung-gu

Lighting Director: Lee Kang-san

Camera Operators: Choi Hyun-ki, Kang Seung-ki,

Chu Kwang-chaе, Seo Min-su, Kim Seok-jung

Crane Operators: Choi Woon-jin, Song Kyung-min

Stills Photography: Han Sae-jun, Park Jong-sun

Special Effects: Jeong Doe-An, Demolition,

Future Vision

Computer Graphics: Insight Visuals

Editor: Kim Sun-min

Assistant Editors: Lee Hee-ok, Lim Hyung-ha,

Lee Sang-min

Production Designer: Ryu Sung-hee

Art Directors: Woo Seung-mi, Lee Chung-mi,

Kim Joo-hyun, Han Sang-min

Set Designer: Yang Heung-sam

Property Master: Yu Chung

Costume Designer: Kim Yu-sun

Costume Assistants: Choi Yun-sun, Son Na-ri,

Noh Joo-hyun

Key Make-up: Hwang Hyun-kyu

Make-up Artists: Kim Jung-ja, Hwang Soo-jung,

Jin Min-kyung

Special Effects Make-up: Shim Jae-ho

Music: Taro Iwashiro

Orchestration/Conducted by: Taro Iwashiro

Synthesizer Programming:

Nobuhiko Nakayama, Hoe Fukazawa

Music Supervisors: Masa Sakuma, Akiko Takakuwa

Score Recorded/Mixed by: Masashi Goto

Sound Design: Kim Young-moon, Kim Jin-kook

Sound Recording: Lee Byung-ha

Cast:

Song Kang-ho (*Detective Park Doo-man*)

Kim Sang-kyung (*Detective Seo Tae-yoon*)

Kim Rwe-ha (*Detective Cho Yong-koo*)

Song Jae-ho

(*Sergeant Shin Dong-chul, Koo's successor*)

Byun Hee-bong (*Sergeant Koo Hee-bong*)

Ryu Tae-ho (*Cho Byung-soon, confirmed perv*)

Park Noh-sik (*Baek Kwang-ho, village idiot*)

Park Hae-il (*Park Hyun-kyu, factory technician*)

Koh Seo-hee (*Officer Kweon Kwi-ok*)

Jeon Mi-seon (*Kwak Seol-yung, illicit doctor*)

South Korea 2003©

131 mins

Digital 4K

\* Uncredited

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

*Memories of Murder* is based on a series of unsolved murders that took place between 1986-91 in provincial South Korea: ten women were raped and murdered but the killer was never brought to justice. Bong Joon Ho's remarkable film goes beyond telescoped details of the failed investigation to construct a desolate portrait of the rents in civil society. As two combative detectives – lazy local detective Park and his lean city rival Seo – clash, then gradually discard their contrasting professional principles, Bong tells a devastating story about the failures of both corruption and rigour and suggests a pessimism leeching through Korean society.

The police station is presented as a clunky old office in bleached out grey and beige. Under a low ceiling, the air fills with smoke and a cop sticks photos of suspects in a scrapbook. The only female officer is confined to making coffee; this masculine world of snacking and petty corruption breeds negligence. The basement boiler room is the scene of wrongheaded hardball and torture, as Park's sidekick stamps on suspects with duster-wrapped boots. A maintenance guy potters in to adjust the boiler while a near delirious suspect struggles to fabricate an acceptable confession.

From the first, the tone is marked by incongruous comedy. Crime scenes mill into chaos as the forensics man tumbles down a slope and bystanders trample vital evidence. The camera pans over these antics until it reaches the corpse: there is a terrible sense of time being lost. Even more challenging is a gruesome cut from a corpse to the bloody meat sizzling in one of the cops' communal meals, and the tragi-farcical blunders seem increasingly less amusing. A radio station thwarts the investigation, leaving Seo standing in a slag heap of trash; as a witness seems close to identifying the murderer, he dies in a pointless train accident, leaving only his fake Nike sneaker on the line. Bong's comedy gathers dispiriting force.

The camera brings us queasily closer to atrocity. At first we see the bodies, then share a victim's point of view. We've already seen her doing domestic chores; now her torch trails uselessly through the dark fields. Finally, we share the killer's viewpoint as he considers potential victims, selecting a schoolgirl who has appeared in previous scenes. The crimes become more personal even as the prospect of arrest recedes. Bong achieves a wonderful poker-faced absurdity. Simple-minded Kwang-ho, hauled in for questioning, eats and watches a TV cop show with the policemen between beatings. Other bizarre details have a factual basis, including Park's visit to a shaman who gives him a charm to reveal the killer's face. It doesn't work, but Park and Seo do spot a man masturbating at the murder spot, torch bobbing from his mouth. The ensuing chase releases the investigators' frustrated energy; a percussive rumble on the soundtrack accompanies the cops pelting after the perv. They eventually erupt into a weirdly busy nocturnal quarry, just one of the dislocations in mood and expectation.

The dynamic between Park and Seo is central to the film and brilliantly played. Park (droll, fleshy Song Kang-ho) survives on instinct, planting evidence and beating out confessions. His sole attempt at deduction is to suggest the murderer lacks pubic hair, so he searches for hairless men in the sauna. He

## Bong Joon Ho: Power and Paradox

### **Memories of Murder** Salineui-chueok

Mon 31 Mar 20:30; Tue 8 Apr 20:30;  
Sun 20 Apr 18:10

### **Barking Dogs Never Bite** Peullandaseuui-gae

Tue 1 Apr 18:15; Sat 19 Apr 20:30 (+ **Incoherence**  
Jirimyulnyeol)

### **Parasite** Gisaengchung

Thu 3 Apr 20:30; Tue 22 Apr 20:30;  
Tue 29 Apr 18:05 (Black & White Version)

### **The Host** Gwaemul

Sat 5 Apr 18:00; Thu 24 Apr 20:30 (+ intro by  
translator and film critic Darcy Paquet)

### **Mother** Madeo

Wed 9 Apr 20:30;  
Sat 26 Apr 14:10 (Black & White Version)

### **Snowpiercer** Seolguk-yeolcha

Fri 11 Apr 18:05; Sat 26 Apr 20:35

### **Okja** Ok-ja

Sat 12 Apr 14:50; Fri 25 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by  
production designer Lee Ha-jun)

### **The Creative Collaborations of Bong Joon Ho**

Thu 24 Apr 18:10

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believes the FBI uses investigative techniques because the US is so large, while Korea is merely 'the size of my dick and can manage without'. Kim Sang-kyung's sardonic Seo views the case as fertile territory for his investigative rigour. He rejects a prime desk for a dark corner and prefers to peel apples on a lads' night out rather than snog or sing.

Only when they belatedly identify a probable killer do the rivals converge. This is an unassuming but implacable young man in a neat grey turtleneck. Seo is so certain of his guilt that he resents waiting for a DNA test (Korea couldn't perform DNA testing, so samples must be sent to the US). In a downpour he manhandles the youth to a rail tunnel and threatens him with the first gun we've seen – previous police brutality has been administered the old-fashioned way. When Park arrives with inconclusive DNA results, Seo's bloodied hands clutch the letter as he snarls: 'The document is a lie, I don't need it.' The suspect, his smooth face mocking, totters up the tunnel as Seo shoots and misses. Seo hurls away his principles and still fails; it's a devastating, inconsolable finale.

The atmosphere of *Memories of Murder* settles like a mist. In this dank, provincial autumn, greys and beiges infect the green of the rice and cabbage fields, a victim's red cinches seem to darken lifelessly in the film's muddy palette. Only the present-day coda introduces blue skies and golden fields. Park now only uses his old techniques to quiz his son about homework. We leave him haunted by the unsolved case: the film ends with him staring, perplexed and greying, into the camera.

These murders tapped into South Korea's collective fantasies and paranoia. We see civil defence drills, crackdown on dissent (cops are unavailable for an important operation because they're off suppressing a demonstration), and zealously enforced blackouts: shop shutters descend, lights disappear during the last murder, stressing the detectives' despairing impotence. Building into a portrait of a society displaying its fractures and fears, a corrosive suspicion of its own institutions, Bong's unpredictable comedy becomes a sombre, forensic examination of failure.

David Jays, *Sight and Sound*, August 2004