



Man on High Heels

A transgender action hero.

Nessie Marie – LGBTQ Media Zine

Content warning before watching the film.

- Bloody, brutal martial arts fights.
- Self-harm.
- Suicide.
- Casual and non-casual homophobia and transphobia (showcased for the sake of the plot and not endorsed by the makers of the film).

Viewer discretion is strongly cautioned.

- Man on High Heels is a Neo-Noir action crime thriller released in South Korea in 2014.
- It stars a cop named Yoon Ji-wook, a cop who is able to capture the most dangerous of criminals and gangsters with ease (not to mention leaving behind a trail of corpses in the process).
- There is one aspect of ji-wook that sets him apart from other cops of her ilk...



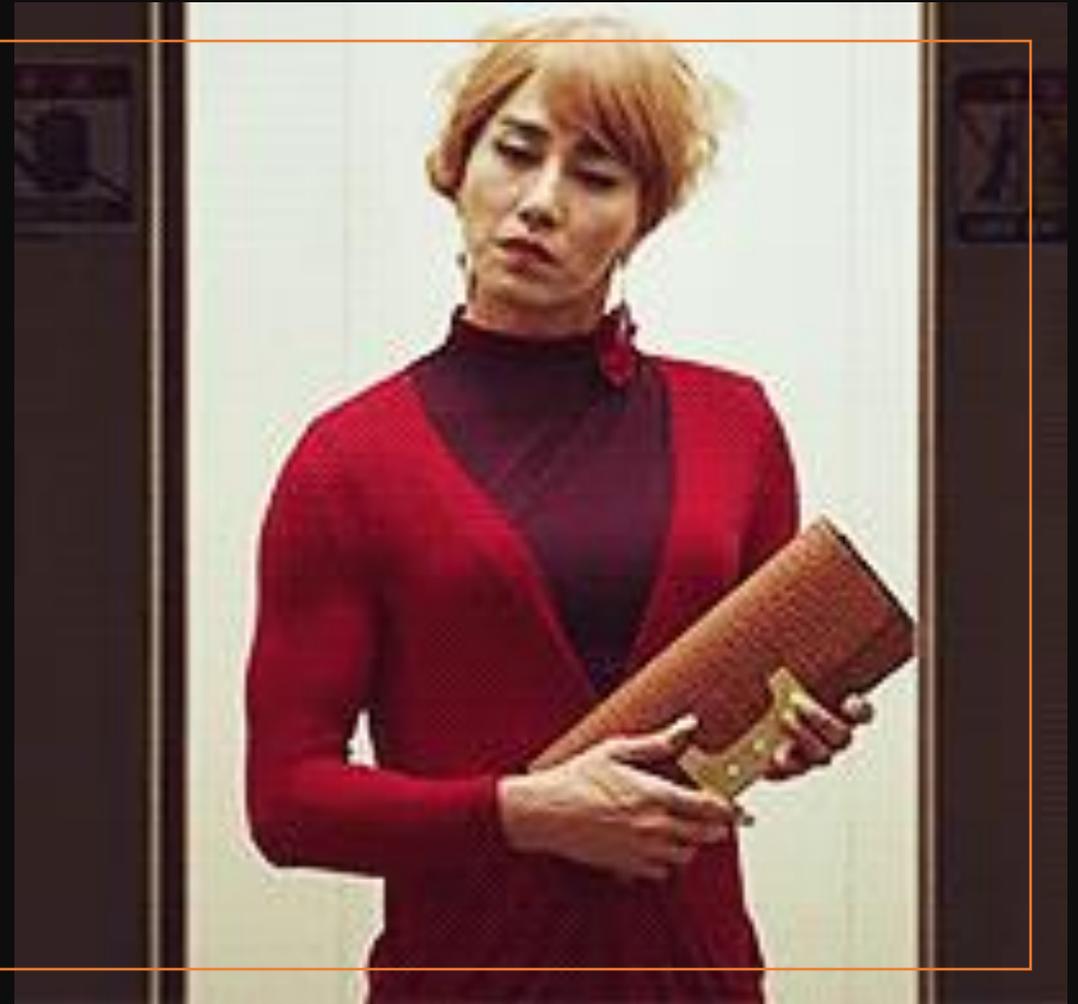


Ji-wook is a loose cannon cop...



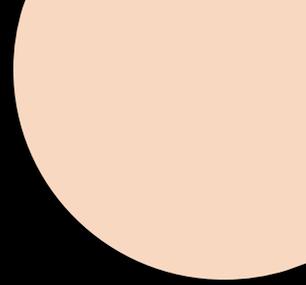
...and is also a She at heart! :3

- Ji-wook is in the process of resigning from her position as a cop in order to facilitate her transition (we see her already undergoing HRT early in the film). It's rare to see a trans character at this stage of transition where they are still presenting as male until it is safer to go full force into transition.
- Even those who are supposed to help her in her transition are shown giving her transphobic ideas (e.g. her HRT therapist chastises her for facial features she cannot control, some other trans girls tell her that she must be hyper feminine, which includes not using her combat prowess).
- The dysphoria Ji-wook experiences throughout the film, especially as juxtaposed with everyone's perception of her without truly knowing this side of her (including the main antagonist, who merely wants her to join his gang due to her sheer combat prowess).



A short digression to admire the cinematography





We learn later in the film via flashback that Ji-wook was in a relationship with another kid around the same age as her back when there were both in high school. The flashbacks tell a tragic tale of the gender nonconforming teen being bullied and ostracized to the point of suicide. It is a brutal yet poignant portrayal of the reality that is a byproduct of discrimination of those that don't conform to societal traditions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, not to mention an integral part of Ji-wook's development as a character throughout the film.





Of course, this film has fight scenes that are quite impeccable in my honest opinion, especially the ones near the end of the film. On top of being brutal, they showcase Ji-woo's feminine fighting style via the elegant use of knives throughout (a commonality of female characters in martial arts films as well as a stark contrast of the "Dress-to-Kill" serial killer type characters), a mark of great storytelling through the use of action.



The trans-gender action hero, in stark contrast to traditional portrayals of violent trans-characters in media, also serves as a great power fantasy for trans-people, as those who identify as trans are too often the target of violent attacks, such as rape and murder.





- This shot in particular is an absolute piece of art in my humble opinion. It is notable that this is one of the few times where Ji-wook forgoes her use of knives in order to jab her fingers into her assailant's throat. In the film's world, the hands behind Ji-wook are the hands of her assailant as he fruitlessly struggles for his life. Internally, they can easily be interpreted as Ji-wook's hands, representing her struggle with gender dysphoria, especially considering her development through the film as well as her brief deviation from her usual fighting style for the sake of an easier kill.



All in all, I highly
recommend the film!

Thanks for reading!