



THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY KOREA

TV

15 Best K-Dramas of 2025, From 'Made in Korea' to 'When Life Gives You Tangerines'

Add these to your list ASAP.



BY JAE-HA KIM

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The *Squid Game* franchise has come to an end (for now), but this year has been about more than just deadly, dystopian games. The best K-dramas of 2025 tackle an array of relevant topics that made us cheer, scream, and cry this year.

Read more: [38 Best K-Dramas of All Time](#)

These K-dramas cover the genre gamut, include a variety of timely topics, from high school bullying to domestic abuse and revenge, to the kind of poverty that leads citizens to despair. These [K-dramas](#) depict the fast-paced life of modern-day South Korea, take us back to the overt corruption of the 1970s, and manage to offer hope during the most dismal times. And no one does slice-of-life shows like Korean creatives, who present everyday life in such a compelling manner that serves as a reminder that sometimes the most ordinary action can also be the most profound.

Below, check out the 14 best K-dramas of 2025 that you'll want to start streaming immediately.



Best BL Dramas of 2025, From 'Heated Rivalry' to 'Khemjira'

If you loved *Heated Rivalry*, explore a curated spread of the best BL dramas of the year.

When Life Gives You Tangerines

If a green flag was a man, it would be Gwan-sik (Park Bo-gum). Devoted to Ae-sun (IU) since their childhood, he repeatedly proves his devotion for her throughout this gorgeous slice-of-life K-drama. When he learns that Ae-sun – orphaned at a young age – is being treated as *less than* at her uncle's house, he brings her fish every day to ensure that she is eating everything her relatives do. After she cries out for him as he sails away to another city, Gwan-sik literally jumps off the ship to swim to her. And when his mother and grandmother pick away at Ae-sun's self worth – something they feel entitled to – he defies tradition and removes her from the toxic environment into their own home.

Read more: [When Life Gives You Tangerines Stars IU & Park Bo-gum on Their Buzzy Netflix K-Drama](#)

The show's deconstructed storyline moves from the 1960s to present day, focusing on the hardships the couple overcome in order to have their happily ever after. Park and IU play their characters as young adults, and the latter also tackles the role of the couple's strong-minded daughter, Geum-myeong. But even Geum-myeong internalizes generational trauma as she deals with what her potential in-laws expect from her. As Ae-sun watches her daughter put herself last before them, she realizes that Geum-myeong learned to do this by watching her. As for the series finale, *warning!* It will tie up loose ends, but it will also break your heart. (Netflix)

Made in Korea

Hyun Bin (*Crash Landing on You*) stars in this political thriller set in the 1970s, a time when South Korea was still reeling from the immediate aftermath of the Korean War. Baek Ki-tae (Bin) is an influential member of the KCIA, which is described in the first episode as a dirty arm of the president's office. Initially, it's not clear if Baek is a hero working undercover, or if he's as corrupt as the drug dealers he's chasing. His nemesis is a tireless prosecutor (Jung Woo-sung) whose goal is to uncover Baek's secrets.

Made in Korea doesn't flinch in its portrayal of corruption by both the Korean government and its strongest ally, the U.S. military. Director Woo Min-ho presents a Korea where there are no heroes, but rather desperate survivors caught in the crosshairs. The series is shot in a film noir style over six-episodes, which will premiere on Dec. 24. This K-drama has already been picked up for its second season. (Hulu)

My Dearest Nemesis

Korean scriptwriters excel at presenting the childhood friends-to-lovers trope. Based on the webtoon of the same Korean title (*He's the Black Dragon*), this K-drama centers on a pair of teenage gamers who reunite as adults who, coincidentally, work for the same company. But he (*Twinkling Watermelon's* Choi Hyun-wook) is the playful wealthy boss who prefers chocolate milk to alcohol, and rock 'n roll to the corporate world he's being forced to live in. And she (Moon Ga-young of *True Beauty*) is one of his hard-working employees.

Do they like each other as adults? Not at first, of course. But they share a past and, more importantly, the kind of familiar chemistry that feels like home. By the finale, it's clear that *dearest* overrides *nemesis*, and that a promising future is ensured. (Viki)

The Manipulated

The Manipulated is a film-to-series adaptation of the 2017 action film *Fabricated City*. Both share the same creative (Park Kwang-hyun) and leading man (Ji Chang-wook). And as with the film, the series explores how a wronged man gets vengeance. In this fast-paced series, a master manipulator sets up Tae-jung (Ji) for a crime he didn't commit. After he is tricked into returning a lost phone to an unseen woman, his life becomes a nightmare. He is accused of sexually assaulting and killing a young woman, and all the evidence points to him and he has no way to prove his innocence. His girlfriend, a younger brother he dotes on, and the dream of opening his own garden nursery are replaced by a life sentence in prison.

The falsely-accused trope has been used often in K-dramas (and western shows, too). But that doesn't lessen *The Manipulated's* impact. Tae-jung is an ordinary hero forced into an unreal world, while his nemesis Yo-han (icily portrayed by EXO's Doh Kyung-soo) thrives on controlling people's lives. *The Manipulated* is at times gruesome, but it's also the perfect combo of binge-worthy revenge and intense psychological warfare. (Hulu)

Beyond the Bar

Hyo-min (Jung Chae-yeon) is a recent law school graduate who is almost unbeatable in court. In this legal procedural, she is mentored by uber-attorney Seok-hoon (Lee Jin-wook), who longs for the family he never had with his ex-wife. The cases they take include a model suing her ex boyfriend for branding her body, and a housekeeper trying to prove that her wealthy boss abuses his daughter. One of *Beyond the Bar's* most compelling episodes revolves around a developmentally disabled artist who is accused of plagiarizing a famous artist's work.

As for the will-they-or-won't-they-get-together element of the series, it almost doesn't matter. The K-drama does such a great job of creating complete characters who don't need a partner to be whole, leaving viewers satisfied with either choice, because we're confident they will all be OK. (Netflix)

Bon Appetit, Your Majesty

Bon Appetit, Your Majesty is a delicious mashup of sageuk (or historical dramas), time travel, and mukbang. The developing love story between 21st century Michelin-star rated chef Ji-yeong (Im Yoon-ah), and Yi Heon (Lee Chae-min) — the petulant king of Joseon — is driven by their shared love of unique, beautifully-prepared food. Ji-yeong can stay in the king's good grace if she cooks him something different at each meal. If she doesn't, or if he doesn't care for what she prepares, she will die.

This K-drama has more mouth-watering scenes than any other show in recent memory, as it introduces current Korean staples like bibimbap, samgyetang (ginseng chicken soup), and pajeon (green onion pancakes) to his majesty. While the plot gets a bit anemic towards the end, the leads share warm chemistry as they fall in love with each other, and with the meals Ji-yeong prepares. (Netflix)

Our Unwritten Seoul

Mi-ji works odd jobs in the sleepy town where she grew up. Her twin sister, Mi-rae, has a respectable office job at a Seoul company that her mother brags about to anyone who'll listen. But after Mi-rae supports another female worker who was sexually harassed, she becomes the office pariah. Mi-rae is bullied to the point that she wishes she could be "lightly grazed by a bus" and stay home from work for a couple days. Worried about her sister's mental health, Mi-ji convinces her twin to swap places.

Park Bo-young beautifully captures the nuances of both sisters and the struggles that each deals with daily. *Our Unwritten Seoul* presents everyday choices that may seem too much to bear, but also offers the kind of realistic hope that's better than a pat, happy ending. (Netflix)

As You Stood By

This K-drama examines domestic abuse and how people are reluctant to help victims — most often because they are afraid of how their actions could be detrimental to their own lives (which is also a subplot in *Our Unwritten Seoul*). While working at a high-end store, Eun-su (Jeon So-nee) notices that her VIP customer has severe scars all over her body but is too scared to report her abusive chaebol husband.

As You Stood By asks the question: Is it ever OK to break the law if you're trying to prevent someone from being harmed? It's complicated, and the dark series doesn't pretend otherwise. While some characters are more awful than others, the writer is careful not to excuse anyone's actions, no matter how detrimental the reason. One of the most chilling moments in the series is when her best friend's mother-in-law recognizes that her son is beating his wife, but doesn't care. (Netflix)

Law and the City

In his first K-drama since 2022's *Big Mouth*, where he portrayed a wrongfully-imprisoned lawyer, Lee Jong-suk returns as matter-of-fact attorney Ahn Joo-hyung in *Law and the City*. He is skilled, but has no interest in office politics or rising up the ranks. His goal every morning is to get through each day. As the narrator says, "Joo-hyung's workday stretches on forever, but he always punches in on time."

There is a subplot between him and new attorney Kang Hee-ji (Moon Ga-young), but it's not their relationship that drives this legal procedural. Rather, it's the suspenseful cases they deal with *and* the mouth-watering lunch-bunch scenes, where the friends eat, bicker, and console each other. Throughout the K-drama, issues like poverty, physical abuse, and pampered chaebol children are addressed with satisfying conclusions. (Viki)

Study Group

Ga-min's love for academics is as strong as his grades are weak. Even as a middle school student, none of his classmates would cram with him. They feared they might do worse on exams just by being in his proximity. In high school, the studious but grade-challenged teen (played by Hwang Min-hyun) hopes to better his chances to get into a good university by transferring to a less prestigious and academically easier high school. But his grades are still at the bottom. The effort that he puts into forming a study group and finding classmates who will join him is a testament to his determination to better himself.

Study Group also is a fast-moving action series where teenagers fight nonstop and rank each other by who can beat up everyone else. Like Clark Kent, who turns into Superman when he removes his glasses, Ga-min proves to be a skilled martial artist who can take down anyone when he removes his. Shout out to Ga-min's mother, who doesn't push academic excellence above all else. "Who cares if you don't do well on tests," she tells him. "That's not the important thing."(Viki)

Heavenly Ever After

In an innovative take on a May-December romance, *Heavenly Ever After* centers on a couple in their eighties. Hae-sook (played by the legendary Kim Hye-ja of *Mother*) is a hardworking money lender who also takes care of her bedridden husband Nak-joon (Son Suk-ku). Not long after he tells her that she is at her most beautiful at her current age, he dies. Her will to live wanes and she follows him up to heaven. Given the choice to remain the same age or younger, she remembers his words to her. So she's surprised, disappointed, and embarrassed when she is reunited with Nak-joon ... who chose to look like his 30-something self.

This show could've used the five-decade physical age gap for cheap laughs. But what it does is present a deeper look at a complicated relationship and how that manifests when you are given a second chance at life (amongst the dead). Once Nak-joon gets used to seeing Hae-sook again, he flirts with her, showing that he's still very much in love *and* attracted to her physically. *Heavenly Ever After* is a slice-of-life series that tackles ageism, sexism, poverty, child trafficking, and alcoholism. (The worst offenders are relegated to

hell in a shockingly gross episode where the punishment for an immoral life on earth includes tongue ripping.) And while all people may not go to heaven, all dogs clearly do. In a beautifully-filmed short but memorable sequence, newbies sent up to heaven are apprehensive and frightened – until they recognize their pets, who've patiently waited for them to arrive. (Netflix)

Mercy For None

So Ji-sub (*My Secret, Terrius, Oh My Venus*) is *back* in this brutal revenge series that depicts how desperate people get pulled into doing bad things. And even when they try to remove themselves from that scenario, they are never completely free of their previous life. In this highly watchable, but *extremely* violent revenge series — think along the lines of Keanu Reeves' *John Wick* franchise or the K-drama *The Worst of Evil* — So plays a retired gangster who's brought back into the fold when his brother is killed.

As he navigates between a pair of dueling gang leaders trying to protect their *kinda sorta* legitimate businesses, we learn who killed his brother and why. Because South Korea

doesn't have a gun culture, this K-drama relies primarily on fists, and just about any sharp object that a fist can grab, as lethal weapons. This series isn't for the faint of heart, but for those who love action-packed shows that offer a sense of justice, *Mercy For None* is not to be missed. (Netflix)

Melo Movie

This emotionally-engaging show is less of a rom-com than it is a slice-of-life K-drama that explores how familial loss greatly impacts who we are today. As Gyeom (Choi Woo-shik) and Mu-bee (Park Bo-young) explore their budding flirtation, we learn more about the traumas that led them to where they are today. Mu-bee was literally named after the word *movie*. After her father worked himself to death in the film industry, Mu-bee tackles her own demons by becoming a director – a way for her to pay homage to her dad's love of films.

Meanwhile, Gyeom's career as an actor never flourished, but he found his niche as a photogenic film critic. Though he doesn't get as much screen time as the lead actors, Kim

Jae-wook steals this series with his heartachingly nuanced portrayal of Gyeom's older brother, Jun. At 20, Jun became Gyeom's guardian when the latter was just 9. Though he does everything he can to provide a happy life for Gyeom, the younger brother lives with a constant feeling of guilt, knowing that he benefited from Jun's sacrifices. (Netflix)

Weak Hero Class 2

No one tops South Korean creatives when it comes to telling high school-centered bullying stories. In the sequel to 2022's *Weak Hero Class 1*, our protagonist Si-eun (Park Ji-hoon) wants nothing more than to be left alone and study. But as with the first season (available on Viki, Kocowa, Netflix), the quiet student's plans are thwarted by his surroundings. His classmates fight incessantly as a way to curry the favor of the school's alpha bully. When they hear rumors about why Si-eun had to transfer schools – *did he really kill someone?!!* – he becomes everyone's target.

The fight scenes are well choreographed. But the most deadly weapon is Si-eun's pen, not because it's the ultimate weapon (though it can be), but because his clicking of it signifies

that he is ready to hold his own. I'd like to think that the pen also signifies that being educated provides a path to a better future. But then again, a pen is sometimes just a pen. I won't ruin the surprise, but there are a couple of notable cameo appearances that fans of the first season will appreciate. (Netflix)

Squid Game 3

The final season of *Squid Game* arrived, and with it, a brutal end (for now) to the saga of Seong Gi-hun (Lee Jung-jae) and his attempts to bring the exploitation of the games to an end. While parts two and three didn't pack quite the punch that first *Squid Game* did, there's still plenty of things to appreciate about the final effort in the series. (The annoying and hedonistic VIPs aren't one of them.)

But on the plus side, favorites like North Korean defector No-eul (Park Gyu-young), idealistic cop Jun-ho (Wi Ha-joon), and pregnant Jun-hee (Jo Yuri) have compelling and complex storylines that propel *Squid Game* to its conclusion. At the end of season 1, Gi-

hun's goal was to end these cruel games that prey on the desperately poor for a chance to win millions of dollars. What the series finale asks is, was it worth it? (Netflix)

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[Jae-Ha Kim](#) is a columnist for the Chicago Tribune news syndicate. Born in Seoul, Kim specializes in covering Korean entertainment for outlets such as Teen Vogue, Rolling Stone, TODAY.com, NPR, [K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim](#), and many more. An in-demand voice on Korean culture, Kim has been featured in publications like ... [Read More](#)



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