



Netflix

TV

The 7 Best K-dramas of 2026 So Far



BY JAE-HA KIM

July 8, 2026

Some people mistakenly describe K-dramas (even the best K-dramas) as soap operas. While daytime shows certainly exist in Korea—typically airing Monday through Friday for about 50 to 200+ episodes—the K-drama umbrella covers a multitude of genres. There's crime (*Signal*), fantasy (*Alchemy of Souls*), medical (*Hospital Playlist*), slice of life (*Our Blues*), time travel (*Lovely Runner*), reincarnation (*See You in My 19th Life*), legal ([Extraordinary Attorney Woo](#)), historical sageuk (*Moon Embracing the Sun*), zombies (*Kingdom*), horror (*Strangers From Hell*) and more.

This year has already been a strong one for K-dramas, with top stars like *Squid Game*'s Park Hae-soo and *Mr. Sunshine*'s Yoo Yeon-seok starring in two of 2026's best shows. It has also been a year where Kim Mu-yeol and Heo Nam-jun became international stars, thanks to their latest shows.

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

Personal taste aside, a major consideration that went into this list was that *all* the episodes had to be released and screened by the time we went to press. This ruled out some currently-airing buzzy shows like *Agent Kim Reactivated*, which have already made us obsessed.

So without further ado, here are our top seven best K-dramas of 2026 so far. Content warning for discussions of violence.



Based on the real-life [Hwaseong Serial Killer](#) who brutally murdered 15 South Korean girls and women from 1986–1994, *The Scarecrow* covers much of the same ground as Bong Joon-ho's 2003 film *Memories of Murder*. But this K-drama more than holds its own, adding fictional twists to keep viewers engaged and guessing. Park Hae-soo (*Squid Game*) portrays Kang Tae-joo, an ace Seoul detective who is demoted back to his rural hometown of Gangseong. He's a hot head, but he's honest and by-the-book. When he's reunited with his high school frenemy Cha Si-young (Lee Hee-joon), who is now a powerful prosecutor, Tae-joo wants nothing to do with him. They have a complicated past based on jealousy, lies, and social hierarchy. Si-young cares less about finding the real culprit than utilizing state-sanctioned force to create one.

In arguably the most powerful scene of the K-drama, director Park Joon-woo depicts a chilling juxtaposition of the killer beating and strangling a woman, while the police torture an innocent man into making a false confession. Which is worse—the deranged serial killer, or the brutal system that allows the empowered to make criminals out of victims? *The Scarecrow* doesn't offer a pat answer. Rather, it makes viewers think about how easily we allow ourselves to be manipulated when we pretend it's all for the greater good. (Viki)



Watch on

ADVERTISEMENT



Yumi's Cells 3

This charming trilogy ends with a happily-ever-after for our heroine Yumi (Kim Go-eun). Seasons 1 and 2 were all about her relationships with Woong (Ahn Bo-hyun) and Ba-bi (played by GOT7's Jinyoung), who at various times seemed like the perfect men for her. Here, the K-drama centers on her prickly working relationship with younger colleague Soon-rok (Kim Jae-won), who annoys her because she can't figure him out. Is he cute or dull? Does she like or resent him? Should she set him up with her friend, or save him for herself? Yumi's not sure, and neither are her internal (and animated) cells, who want nothing more than for her to be happy.

This series *gets it* that inner peace isn't something derived from external forces. A cute man won't make her life better until she works through her lingering issues, which include issues with aging. Now in her late 30s, she refuses to believe there is much difference between her and her Gen Z suitor—something that doesn't bother him, but weighs heavily on her. It's at times like this that her conflicting internal cells emerge to push their agenda. What *Yumi's Cells* concludes is that at the end of the day, neither logic nor love make much sense. But the combination of both is what provides peace. (Viki)



Watch on

Teach You a Lesson

In the first couple minutes of *Teach You a Lesson*, a high school bully is slapped so hard that he goes skidding across the hallway. It's not another student who gave the kid his comeuppance, but rather a mid-30s former military captain who smacks him each time the kid mouths off. Na Hwa-jin (Kim Mu-yeol) is part of a government-sanctioned group that infiltrates problematic schools in order to make them a safer environment for students *and* teachers.



School bullying is a common K-drama plot device that usually ends with the teenage victim either dying or fighting back. What *Teach You a Lesson* provides is an unrealistic, but nonetheless cathartic compromise—give an elite team permission to physically punish the children who hurt their classmates, and get rid of the teachers who reward the privileged kids at the expense of everyone else. The series does depict a modicum of hope that the abusers can evolve. Some former bullies repent and shift their behavioral modification. Throughout it all, *Teach You a Lesson* doesn't pretend that violence will solve anything permanently. What it argues, however, is that weeding out bad seeds is a necessity that sometimes can't be taught with anything else but fear. (Netflix)



Watch on

Phantom Lawyer

In one of the most delightfully clever K-dramas of 2026, Yoo Yeon-seok portrays Shin Yi-rang, a smart attorney who no one will hire. Why? Because his now-deceased father had been accused of being a corrupt prosecutor, and no law firm wants to have their company associated with those allegations. Eventually, Yi-rang opens his own practice in a shabby space that had previously belonged to a shaman – an intermediary between the dead and the living. This plot device is used to explain why his undead clients need him to get



But when he opens up to fellow attorney Han Na-hyun (Esom) and his brother-in-law Yoon Bong-su (*Kingdom*'s hilarious Jeon Seok-ho), the Scooby Gang tackles the most fascinating and often heartbreaking cases, including the death of K-pop idol trainee, a gangster who wants Yi-rang to prove he died due to medical malpractice, and the kidnapping and murder of a young child who's not sure he's even dead. At various points, the clients jump into his body so they can enjoy one last meal, help solve the cause of their own death, or say goodbye to a loved one. And it's in those moments that Yoo excels as Yi-rang—offering a few moments of life to give them the closure that they need. (Netflix, Viki, Kocowa)

ADVERTISEMENT



Watch on

We Are All Trying Here

It's no surprise that *We are All Trying Here* is one of the year's best. Written by Park Hae-young, who also penned *My Mister* and *My Liberation Notes*, the K-drama captures the pathos of surviving every day when life doesn't always seem to be worth living. The Korean title for this show encapsulates the show's thesis more accurately. “모두가 자신의 무가치함과 싸우고 있다” translates to, “We are All Fighting Our Own Worthlessness.” Hwang Dong-man (Koo Kyo-hwan) teaches filmmaking to students, but is burdened by the



around him anymore.

Meanwhile, Byeon Eun-ah (*Go Youn-jung*) is a brilliant scriptwriter who toils away as a script editor instead for a boss who tolerates her, but diminishes her talent and mocks her. When she overhears her colleagues trash talking Dong-man and dismissing him as incompetent, likening him to a chef who can't cook or a teacher who can't teach, she pointedly says, "You're human, but you're not humane." The biggest message in *We Are All Trying Here* isn't that love will conquer all, but that acceptance of our own "worthlessness" is the best gift we can give ourselves. (Netflix)



Watch on

ADVERTISEMENT



My Royal Nemesis

This charming fish-out-of-water K-drama explores timeslips, shamanism, betrayal and, most of all, unconditional love that spans eras. Kang Dan-shim (Lim Ji-yeon, *The Glory*) is a consort in the Joseon Dynasty when she is sentenced to death. But instead of dying, Dan-shim wakes up on the set of a 21st Century K-drama in the body of former child actress, Shin Seo-ri. Dan-shim doesn't act so much as she reacts to what is happening around her. This draws the ire of the jealous leading lady on set *and* the attention of rakish chaebol grandson, Cha Se-gye (Heo Nam-jun).

As the series progresses, we learn that Se-gye's business skills are constantly undermined by his jealous cousin Moon-do (played by *As You Stood By* villain Jang Seung-jo). The what-happens-next plot device is driven by clever backstories that depict how the main characters' lives intersected in Joseon. Who they were then informs who they are today, for better *and* for worse. There are a few things to quibble about. For instance, no Joseon woman would ever dare bare her skin like Seo-ri does when she lands a modeling contract, and she certainly wouldn't be able to navigate today's technology as well as Dan-shim does. But what this series depicts so well is that Dan-shim understands that her survival is dependent on her adaptability. The result is not one, but two happily ever afters. (Netflix)



Watch on

Pro Bono

Jung Kyung-ho portrays charismatic judge Kang Da-wit, who seems destined for a political career. But after a night out with an old school buddy, he's caught on camera accepting what appears to be a bribe. Da-wit loses his job, but lands a new one as a pro bono attorney. He doesn't like any of it – the loss of status, the dingy office, colleagues he views as beneath him, and cases he doesn't want to try in court. But for all his



ADVERTISEMENT

The cases presented in each episode reflect real-life South Korean issues, like criminally-lenient sentencing for crimes committed against women, discriminating against (and underpaying) foreign laborers, and the prejudice against biracial children who are dismissed as not being *real* Koreans. There's also a story arc that depicts the downfall of a K-pop idol whose life is being destroyed by sasaengs, netizens, and even her own family. As his team tackles cases that appear unwinnable, Da-wit reflects on his own humble beginnings that spurred him on to pursue a legal career. While he's still arrogant by the series' end, it's also clear that Da-wit has been humbled *and* found his niche championing those who have no voice. *Pro Bono* aired from December 2025 to January 2026. (Netflix)