

WHAT A VIEW | STEPHEN MCCARTY

Dazed and confused

Korean comedy crime caper Han River Police falls short on laughs while the extraterrestrial violation of a desolate Earth hits home in Invasion.

Straight from its launch, *Han River Police* (Disney+) seemed to drift into the doldrums of indecision, or even an identity crisis.

Billed as an action comedy, it was too short on laughs to be funny and too short on intrigue and action to be a thriller. Nor did it have the necessary slapstick buffoonery to qualify as farce.

With its initial, six-part voyage now complete, it remains to be seen whether the show will sink without trace or take another punt up Seoul's main arterial waterway (no, not the Cheonggyecheon Stream).

The river police constitute a division (which squabbles with the South Korean capital's main force) dedicated to ensuring safe, public enjoyment of its beat. Its main members have to remind themselves, often, of this commitment, lest it interfere with their real interest: eating out and drinking, with a sideline of worrying about the consistency of their office-cooked noodles.

Kwon Sang-woo is grouchy Sergeant Han Du-jin, partner of work-shy whinger Lee Cheon-seok (Kim Hee-won) and junior officer Kim Ji-soo (Shin Hyun-



seung). Hanging around them is Corporal Do Na-hee (Bae Da-bin), from another unit. She tries to give frosty Du-jin the glad eye, usually when she's drunk, while remaining steadfastly unimpressed by Ji-soo, who idolises her.

There's not much tension in the relationships and even less comedy. Perhaps that's supposed to come from an ex-colleague turned part-time crook, or the continuing storyline about a river cruise ship that runs aground and triggers an emergency response – even though it looks within paddling distance of the shore and no one aboard is in any real jeopardy.

No one, that is, except the hapless captain, who incurs the wrath of Go Gi-seok (Lee Sang-yi), heir to corporate riches and a sneering brat implicated in political corruption pertaining to river-front exploitation.

Gi-seok would at least have vile anti-hero potential – had he, too, not been scuttled by such a confused production.

The truth is out there

David Bowie – Starman, Major Tom and Ziggy Stardust himself – might have considered it the ultimate realisation of his work.

Communication with aliens is finally achieved in *Invasion* (Apple TV+) – to the tune of Bowie's *Space Oddity*. An astral obsessive and talisman in the lives of astronaut Hinata Murai (Rinko Kikuchi) and scientist Mitsuki Yamato (Shioli Kutsuna), Bowie would have been thrilled by his tangential role in interstellar relations ... even if our colonisers are savage, blade-wielding, murderous monsters.

Series two gives us – at last! – a close-up of the aliens' suburban-sized craft, an entire fleet of which is parked around Earth, deploying “troops” programmed to slaughter humans.

Looking like Sputnik with extra legs, each acrobatic, growling menace over-running the planet gives Homo sapiens a big gulp of their own foul medicine: the





Far left: Bae Da-bin (left) in *Han River Police*. **Left:** Lee Sang-yi in the show. Pictures: Disney+

rest of the animal kingdom must have felt the same way when we arrived.

All science fiction is ultimately a comment on our own status; and in its echoes of Covid-era Earth, with its deserted streets and rotting rubbish, *Invasion* is no different. And although it doesn't feature warp speed, transporter rooms or lightsabres, it does have a couple of characters who can communicate (after a fashion) with the enemy, one of whom (Yamato) doubles as a street-fighting Molotov cocktail chucker. She might have led a guerilla unit in Tom Cruise's 2005 adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*.

Invasion also offers a fully global perspective on a planet under attack, the action taking place more or less simultaneously in Osaka, Brazil, Paris, Oklahoma, London and other places. The World Defense Council is our response coordinator, which clearly has a severe problem, Houston: each new burgeoning, rat-ridden refugee tent city looks even worse than Glastonbury. ■



Shioli Kutsuna stars in the second season of *Invasion*. Picture: Apple TV+

THING OF BEAUTY | RICHARD LORD

Family values

The story of a tumultuous extramarital affair and its far-reaching consequences, set against an expansive backdrop of rapidly changing Russian society in the 19th century, Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina (1878) is widely considered one of the world's great works of literature. Lynn Fung, director of Sheung Wan's Liang Yi Museum, one of the largest private museums in Asia, which specialises in Chinese antiques and other decorative items, explains how it changed her life.

The book that had a profound impact on me was *Anna Karenina*, and not just for the usual reasons of it being a work of immense beauty. I was in sixth form and was doing literature for my A-levels. As part of our final-year coursework, we were asked to choose a novel and write our thesis on it. You could be left alone until the day you handed in your coursework.

The day that I was supposed to hand it in, I was feeling unwell, so I asked my best friend to submit it on my behalf. She reported that my teacher had taken one look at the title page and voiced her disbelief that a 16-year-old would have read the entirety of this epic novel in the time frame, on her own, and submitted 20 pages on the topic without any outside help. In essence, she had accused me of plagiarism in absentia.

My father (tycoon Peter Fung Yiu-fai), who has always had a very hands-off attitude towards his children's schoolwork, learned of this and was completely incensed. He wrote a letter to the principal and teacher: seeing as I had always been a student of good standing, who had clearly demonstrated a great love and enthusiasm for reading and literature, he wondered how my teacher could have such a low opinion of both my character and her own teaching skills.

What this episode taught me, and what in my mind *Anna Karenina* has always stood for, was: if you exceed people's expectations too much, you're not always rewarded for it. It doesn't mean you shouldn't try, but it's good to let people know at some point along the way what you are trying to achieve. I find that extends to my professional life to this day. I've always liked working independently, at my own pace – but as the director of a museum, it is also part of my job to check in on



Lynn Fung, director of the Liang Yi Museum, in Sheung Wan. Picture: Liang Yi Museum

my team regularly and make sure people are not only on the same page, but given the opportunity to give me feedback.

The second thing I was taught was just how important family is. My parents had always fostered independence in us, and helping with homework was just not something they did. But at a crucial moment, my father stepped in and advocated on my behalf.

The novel itself is, of course, focused on families, as its famous opening line states ("Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"). It's about how they are torn apart, but also about how they are built and the work it takes to hold them together. Now that I work in the family business (the museum was founded by her father), I think a lot about that: how I am the steward of my family's collection and advocating on their behalf, by presenting the objects in exhibitions that hopefully also have something original to say.

This episode did nothing to taint my love of literature: I continued studying it, and to this day, narrative and storytelling are a key part of how we position the museum's exhibitions.



A 1901 painting of author Leo Tolstoy. Picture: Getty Images