

Grand Mega Audition



CØMP5

CHILDREN OF MEN (2007)



Dystopian, Thriller

GATTACA (1997)



Drama, Sci-fi, Thriller

TONE AND SETTING

A reflection of the real population crisis in South Korea, this story considers a science fiction approach to the declining birth rates.

Sandwiched between a declining population crisis and a corrupt government, a female scientist is left to compete for resources in an industry dominated by older men.

Genres explored are Sci-Fi (in a dystopian near-future), Drama.

KIM HYERAN

Hyeran is a scientist working with the artificial production of fetuses. She believes that this is the key to solving Korea's birth rate problem, as the population declines to a concerning low number.

She must grapple with selfish government officials to save the genetic diversity of future generations.



DIRECTOR LEE

A veteran government official known for his ability to make negotiations in stressful situations, Director Lee is an intimidating force of the auditorium.

Hyeran is not sure if she can trust him, as he picks apart her presentations with both brutal honesty and care.



DR. PARK

Dr. Park is Hyeran's colleague,
and acts as her mentor figure.

He's a well-known and
respected scientist in his field:
artificial reproduction.

Alongside Hyeran, they set out
on solving the declining
population with their fetus
production technology.



At a conference, in an upscale hotel, tables filled with expensive traditional snacks, and seats lined with middle-aged men, Kim Hyeran feels out of place, but the fancy setup made it clear that she could not have declined the invitation casually.



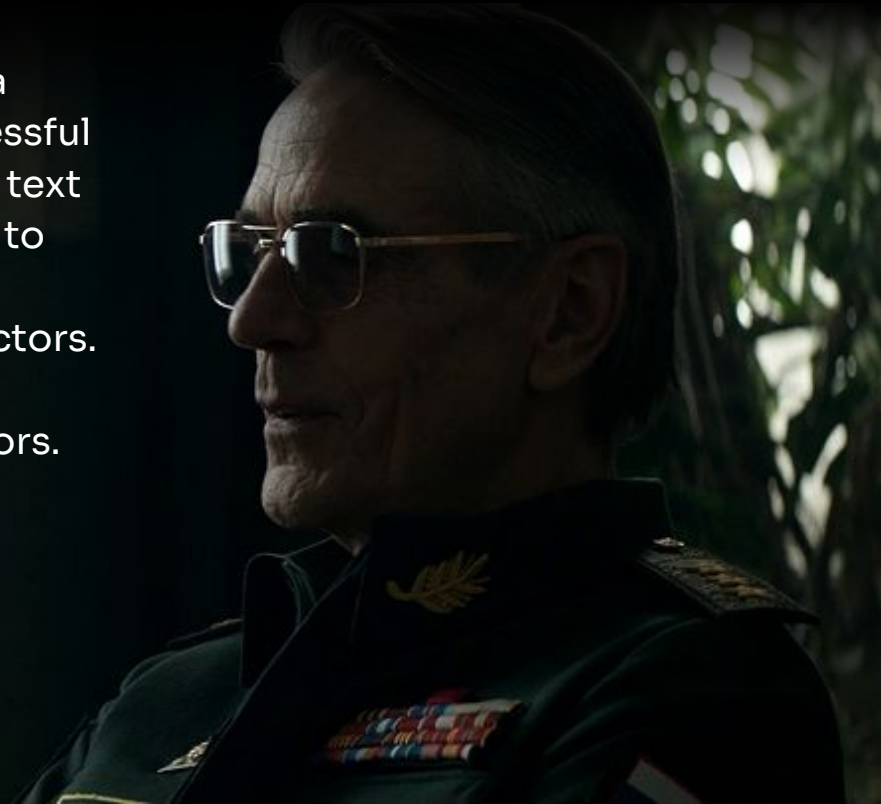
The man at the podium speaks, "Recently, the number of babies being born in Korea has plummeted. If this continues, there will be fewer and fewer children growing up in Korea, and eventually, the population may disappear, leading to the natural dissolution of the nation. At this critical juncture, the government has made a decisive move to establish a new department, the Population Department. To fulfill this mission, we will mobilize all the nation's capabilities..." and so on.



As the procession continued, different presenters came up to speak on the podium, usually with variations of the same statements that had been made by the speakers prior. It was mundane, but the important officials and experts gathered at the conference seemed sated. Suddenly an obstetrician brings up the prospect of raising pay for his field. After all, his work is important to the process of childbirth.



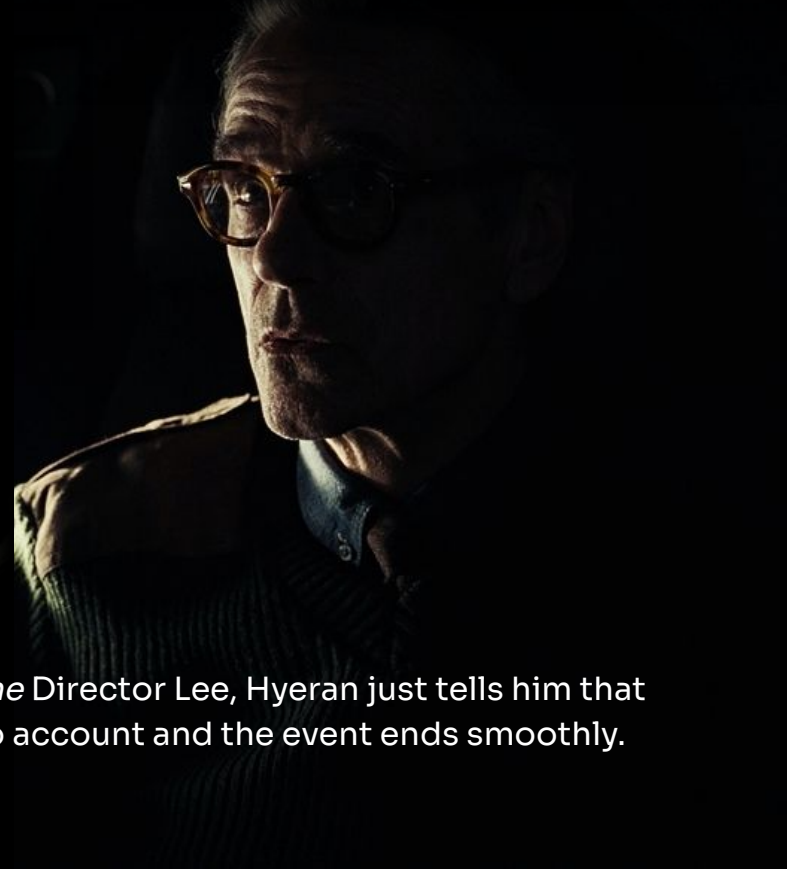
He is immediately shut down by Director Lee, a high-ranking official adept at dealing with stressful situations and negotiations. Hyeran receives a text from Dr. Park, that says that the Director failed to become a doctor in college, consequently developing an inferiority complex towards doctors. Hyeran looks at the man, he seems more like someone who dislikes everyone, not just doctors.



Then, it is Hyeran's turn to present. At this point, the audience is about to fall asleep, tired out by the long string of presentations before. Regardless of the low enthusiasm in the room, she presents her company's technology: collecting human cells, putting them into a machine, and then growing these cells into a fetus that can then be born.



Director Lee had been listening, intently. Surprisingly, he is impressed by her presentation and her proposed solution to the population decline. However, he brings up a sharpened question—how would the test tube children be raised? Surely, the government wouldn't want to handle the immense funding that would be required to support so many children.



Defeated and unwilling to argue with *the* Director Lee, Hyeran just tells him that her company will take his feedback into account and the event ends smoothly.

Later, Hyeran shares a drink with Dr. Park, who tells her that he heard Director Lee had been complaining about the lack of innovation among the presentations at the conference.




Hyeran is more relieved than disturbed. The fact that such trivial rumors were spreading meant that the event had been not bad, but not all that groundbreaking. Not a disaster.

The next week, a public announcement is made. The government would be implementing drastic measures to combat the low birth rates. Based on the number of children, families would receive special benefits such as exempted military service and increased chances to become officials, doctors, and lawyers. However, families with only one child would be punished. The only child would have to pay an extra tax on their income throughout their lives.



Hyeran could sense that, although it was the Minister speaking, the speech had been written by Director Lee. The words used in the speech matched exactly with the Director's bland, bureaucratic way of speaking.





The reporters at the Minister's speech erupt with questions disguised as nervous critique of the new policy. The new rules seem like threats and punishments. Dr. Park tells Hyeran that this is basically just the government moving the responsibility of the declining population onto the citizens.

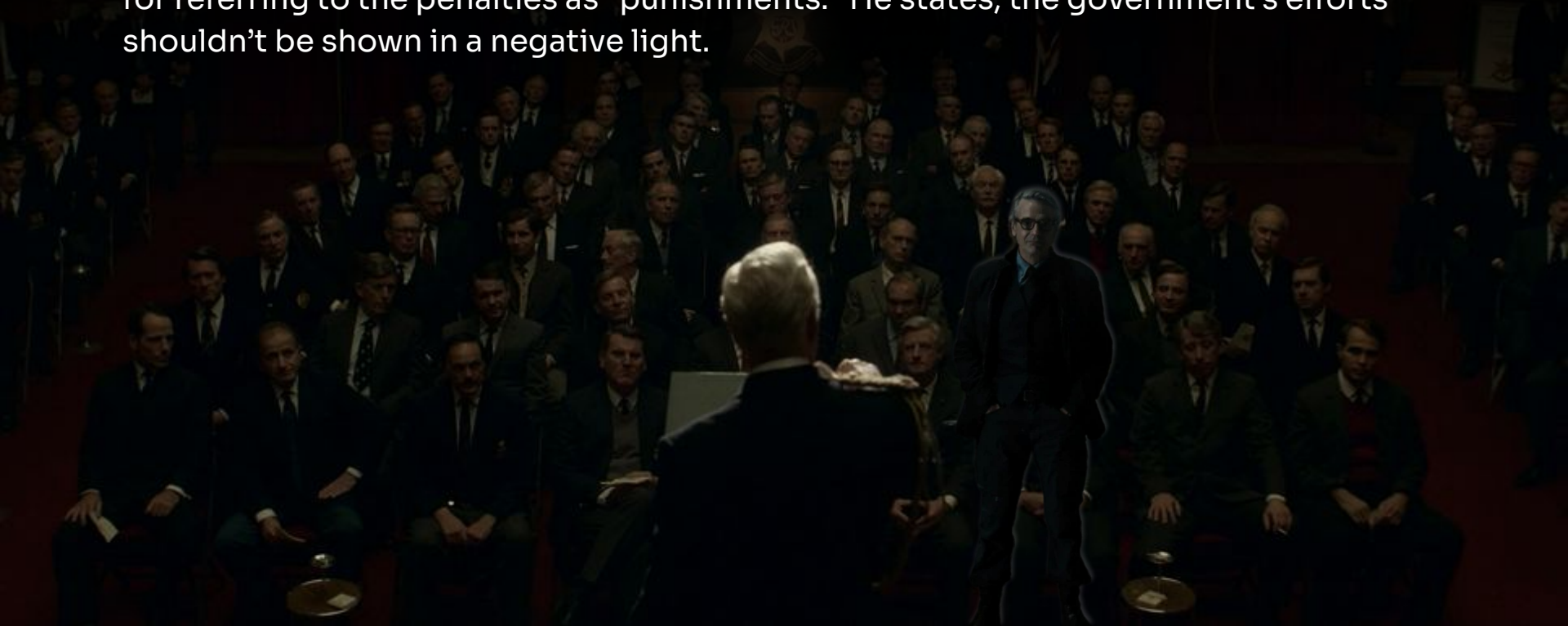
Despite the new measures, the population continues to decline. In fact, more people are deciding not to have children at all. Experts report that this is likely due to the benefits of not having children outweighing the benefits of having several children. According to the news, the penalties are not severe enough.



As a result, the government raised the stakes. Now, only families with 3 or more children were exempt from the extra tax and had the freedom to become officials, doctors, and lawyers. Birth rates declined further.



Director Lee organizes another conference, to which Hyeran is also invited. This time, instead of doctors, the conference was full of lawyers, former police officers, and crime experts. One lawyer accuses the citizens of taking advantage of loopholes such as marrying to increase their legal children count, but is reprimanded by the Director for referring to the penalties as “punishments.” He states, the government’s efforts shouldn’t be shown in a negative light.



It is Hyeran's turn to present again. This time, Director Lee shows a keener interest in her company's work, even asking about how many fetuses they have raised in other countries such as the U.S. and Japan. For the first time, Hyeran sees his expression soften for a moment.



After the conference, the government continues to make stricter and stricter policies. A branch known as SAVAT is employed to identify and arrest citizens who have been breaking these policies and utilizing loopholes. Despite this, the birthrates continue to plummet, eventually reaching zero. This constant decline became known as “The Korean Mystery.”



Eventually, the government gives in. Director Lee invites Hyeran for a one-on-one meeting. Hyeran enters the militaristic SAVAK Headquarters, unnerved, but knowing that she needs to meet someone as important as Director Lee. The Director tells Hyeran that her company is the last hope for the population and that the government would fund the production of a million fetuses per year. Hyeran is stunned by the massive scale of the proposal.



They would collect the cells of the most healthy, most productive Koreans and use them to create these superior fetuses. Hyeran is concerned about the homogeneity of the next generations but decides to comply with Director Lee's ideas for the project. This project is named the King Suro Project.



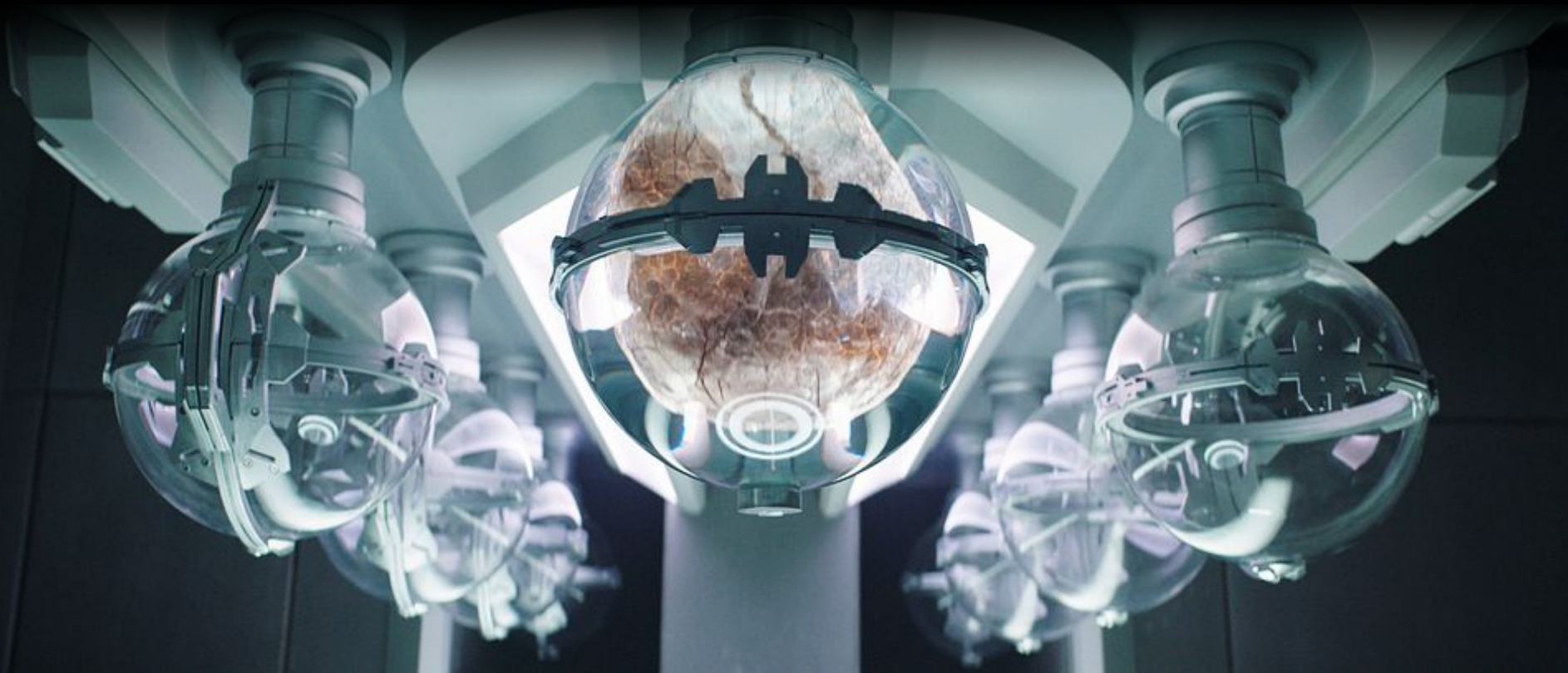
The King Suro Project does not go as planned. The first batch of cells are wiped out by a virus, frustrating Director Lee. Hyeran explains that the lack of genetic diversity makes the small sample prone to these sorts of failures. With some persuasion, she is able to convince the Director to diversify their cell samples and collect from a wider batch of Koreans.



After this, the next batches are successful, impressing Director Lee. Hyeran is not used to seeing the usually cold, austere Director in this way. The stone-faced man is now smiling. However, Hyeran feels inexplicably uncomfortable...



Soon, Dr. Park reports that the government had just launched another department, the Next-Generation Korean Promotion Institute, to take over the fetus production business. Their own company was out of the Korean baby business. Hyeran is devastated. Because this new company is government funded, there would be no way for Hyeran's business to compete. Soon after this announcement, the government banned any other companies from producing fetuses.



A rumor beings circulating: government officials were taking advantage of the Next-Generation Korean Promotion Institute to infuse the next generation with their own cells. Their bloodline would make up the future of Koreans at an overwhelming proportion.



Enraged, Dr. Park comes out to argue against the unjustified corruption among the government officials in the fetus production project. Because Dr. Park is a long-running, well respected member of the scientific community, his words have impact, forcing the government to launch a fair set of standards for choosing which cells and whose DNA to include in the fetuses.



Among the public, a multitude of gene-choosing methods emerged. However, because of the uncertainty of which human qualities would end up being the most useful in the future, the project settled on a specific system: a contestant-based TV show. People would audition to have their genes passed onto the next generation and viewers would vote on who they liked most. This is a format Korean were familiar with, and this endeavor proved successful.



Hyeran, satisfied with the results of her technology and the reformation of the formerly corrupt fetus production system, even becomes a judge on the TV show, *Descendants of Dangun*, where she is featured alongside celebrities and hosts. The show is a hit.



Amidst her success, the President himself comes to Hyeran to ask, "How about separating the genes into those for noble roles and those for servant roles, and producing two types of babies accordingly? Hyeran, smiling, refuses, "You can't be serious, can you?"





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Stories worth the binge **Manta**