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'Beef' Is a Certified Delicious Grade-A Psychological Comedy

written by Toan Le • 1 year ago



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Continuing the recent success of Asian representation at the Academy Awards, A24 delivers again with "Beef," showing more complexity to the Asian community and their stories. Like life, its characters can be outrageously crazy and impulsively chaotic just like everyone else.

The series follows the fallout of a road rage incident between two strangers, Daniel Cho (Steven Yeun), an independent contractor, and Amy Lau (Ali Wong), a successful entrepreneur and proud owner of a plant business called Koyohaus. As a result, they make destructive decisions to seek out and destroy each other in pettiness and impulsiveness.

Soon, their obsession with each other chaotically impacts their own personal lives—Danny with his complicated relationship with his brother, Paul (Young Mazino) and his cousin, Isaac (David Choe), and Amy dealing with her artistic husband, George (Joseph Lee). Their actions eventually create consequences that none can bear, leaving them to question their own bigger life choices.

The show has exemplary originality, layering such a mundane concept with numerous intricate details about two regular, unrestrained strangers. Lee Sung Jin, the creator, really taps into the wild side of the human condition to produce something so entertaining and intoxicating. The characters feel fleshed out and complex as if they could be anyone's next-door neighbors; they seem real and relatable.

The most praise goes to its writing and storytelling with details that seem so thoughtful and invested. There is never a dull moment in any episode as it builds up to an ambiguous conclusion. Every page and piece of dialogue adds new meanings to the overall identity of the show. The humor meshes exceptionally well with the story. It not only creates a subtle moment between intense drama, but it also reveals something noteworthy about the characters' lives and their rage-filled personalities.

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The show's central plot surges up a high enticing level of originality.
Photo courtesy of Netflix

The show never stops to rest, but rather, it keeps pushing the limitations of storytelling, taking on narrative risks to output something so rewarding to watch or binge. The payoffs are also well executed as the show progresses with many answers unearthing a humorous irony. The twists the audience experiences are nail-bitingly prodigious as they are means for the characters to develop, for better or worse.

The almost all-Asian cast plays their part nicely – a considerate thought from the creator to instill Asian cultural aspects to the show. Some of the supporting characters even become a troubling obstacle for the main protagonists to overcome; however, they do pour more fuel into their unrelenting feud.

Of course, the show would not have been propelled to such deserving praise without its two talented leads. Yeun and Wong complement each other so marvelously that the fine line between friends and enemies becomes microscopic. Their expressions and deliveries are pitch-perfect as they scheme against one another, verbally battling each other out for blood. Their chemistry is off-the-chart irresistible as if the viewers are watching two high schoolers' petty war over something so outrageously stupid. Yuen and Wong's candor is the show's prime cut. Their emotions toward each other astutely shift back and forth between hate and compassion, leaving the audience room to question the validity of their endless feud.



Steven Yeun and Ali Wong deliver such compelling performances with exceptional chemistry.
Photo courtesy of Netflix

There are instances where the two protagonists instill a memorable moment about their connection and relatability toward each other. What first comes to mind is when they both aggressively confront a random person complaining about them loitering in a parking space.

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Ali Wong amazingly embodies the rage-filled persona of a successful businesswoman.
Photo courtesy of Netflix

Yeun plays his role outstandingly as a hard-working Korean, trying to support his well-being as well as his brother's. This might seem like a simple role, but Yeun brings out the best vengeful yet complex quality of a man who has too much on his plate. On the other side, Wong superbly embodies a stressed businesswoman, juggling the balance between work and family. She smartly creates a presence that the audience has to fear whether or not she will unleash her primal rage.



Steven Yeun (Danny) marvelously portrays a hard-working Korean with too much on his plate. Photo courtesy of Netflix

Another appreciative aspect is Jin's implementation of character traits; the characters are not very likable, including the two leads, but they all have a redeeming quality that is very relatable to the masses, pointing out that anyone can be out-of-control.

The show is an astounding achievement in originality and writing, maintaining a witty and heated intensity over the span of 10 episodes. In combination with sublime, diabolical performances from its two leads, "Beef" finely leaves a savory aftertaste that will have the audience craving more.

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