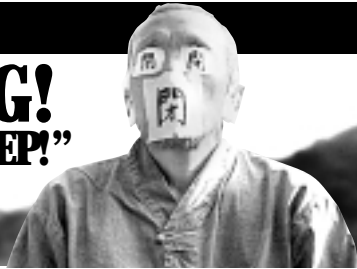


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**“SPELLBINDING!  
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**“AN EXQUISITELY SIMPLE MOVIE**

**...ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A  
BUDDHIST MONK AND HIS PROTÉGÉ.  
A PROFOUND AND SOPHISTICATED  
ARTISTIC SENSIBILITY.”**

-A.O. Scott, THE NEW YORK TIMES



**SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER  
A FILM BY KIM KI-DUK** **...AND SPRING**

[www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)

Set entirely in and around a beautiful floating Buddhist monastery with breathtaking vistas, this understated and elegant film by Korean writer-director-actor Kim Ki-duk examines a man's life in five telling moments. Under the tutelage of an old monk, a youngster learns the secrets and lessons of the world around him. An unsentimental but powerful evocation of desire and aging.

SOUTH KOREA • 2003 • 103 mins • Color • In Korean with English subtitles

# A Buddhist Observes Humanity With Sharp and Stern Eyes

A.O. SCOTT

"Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring" is an exquisitely simple movie. Written and directed by Kim Ki Duk, it was filmed at a single location – a remote and picturesque mountain lake in a South Korean wilderness preserve – and it concentrates on the relationship between a Buddhist monk and his young protégé, characters whose names are never spoken. But like Blake's "Songs of Innocence and Experience," the film's lyrical plainness is the sign of a profound and sophisticated artistic sensibility. In five sharp, concise vignettes that correspond to the seasons of the title, Mr. Kim manages to isolate something essential about human nature and at the same time, even more astonishingly, to comprehend the scope of human experience.

The subject of "Spring" is spiritual discipline, which the older monk distills into a set of lessons that are, like the film, self-evident and enigmatic. They also reflect aspects of Buddhism not always sufficiently appreciated in the West, often witty and occasionally harsh.

In the first chapter the child monk, indulging a boyish taste for cruelty to animals, ties rocks around the bodies of a fish, a frog and a snake and laughs as they struggle to move. That night the older monk ties a stone to the boy, saying he will remove it when the animals are free. There is an element of slapstick in this punishment, as well as a severe and uncompromising notion of responsibility. If any of the animals have died, the teacher tells his pupil, "you will carry this stone in your heart for the rest of your life."

Animals figure in other chapters: a cat's tail is used as a calligraphy brush, and there is a quizzical rooster and a deadpan turtle. They are emblems of the natural world, Aesopian metaphors offering silent commentary on the foibles of humanity.

The master and his protégé live in extreme isolation; their small wooden house, on a raft in the middle of the lake, is the only habitation for miles around. But emissaries from the outside world occasionally reach them. In "Summer" they are joined by a young woman seeking treatment for an unspecified disease. (The style of her clothes is one of the few indications that the film takes place in modern times.) She and the younger monk, who since "Spring" has become a man, slip into a love affair that marks his fall from innocence into experience. "Lust," his tolerant mentor warns, "awakens the desire to possess, which ends in the intent to murder."

When the mentor is proved right in "Autumn," the proof may at first seem melodramatic and literal minded. For all its hushed, philosophical mood, Mr. Kim's film, which will be shown tonight and tomorrow at the New Directors/New Films series before opening commercially on Friday, has moments of intense, theatrical feeling.

But the story, effortlessly joining the cycle of the seasons to the larger rhythms of the life cycle, has a beguiling perfection. Along the way there are numerous surprises, and you are never sure, as one chapter gives way to the next, how many changes will have taken place. But by the end – when you are back at spring, with a young



acolyte and a gray-haired master – the film takes on the heft and gravity of one of the smooth stone Buddhas that decorate the old monk's house. It seems less a modern work of art than a solid, ancient object that has always been there, waiting to be found.

(Excerpt)

## SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER... AND SPRING

Written (in Korean, with English subtitles), edited and directed by Kim Ki Duk; director of photography, Baek Dong Hyun; music by Bark Ji Woong; art director, Oh Sang Man; produced by Lee Seung Jae. Running time: 103 minutes. This film is rated R.

WITH: Oh Young Soo (Old Monk), Kim Ki Duk (Adult Monk), Kim Young Min (Young Adult Monk), Seo Jae Kyung (Boy Monk), Ha Yeo Jin (Girl), Kim Jong Ho (Child Monk), Kim Jung Young (Girl's Mother), Ji Dae Han (Detective Ji), Choi Min (Detective Choi), Park Ji A (Baby's Mother) and Song Min Young (Baby).

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