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‘Pachinko’ Bosses Talk “Resilience And Hope” Of Emotional Finale, Tease “Even More Dramatic” Season 2 Storylines

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‘Pachinko’ Apple TV+

SPOILER ALERT: This post contains details about the season one finale of *Pachinko*, titled “Chapter Eight.”

The *Pachinko* season ender offers optimism and growth from heartbreaking losses for nearly all generations of the Baek family.

The episode begins in 1938, years after Noa’s birth. Now seven years old, Noa prepares for baby brother Mozasu’s *doljabi* ceremony. Just before audiences can see what fate-determining item Mozasu picks, a remixed, pop version of the opening sequence livens things up.

From Mozasu’s *dol* to Hana’s (Mari Yamamoto) final moments, the finale spans the cycle of life. In the present, Hana’s surrounded by her loved ones, including Sunja (Yuh-jung Youn) and Etsuko (Kaho Minami), who have no choice but to accept her eventual death. Tragedy also strikes in the past, with Noa and Sunja (Minha Kim) learning that Isak (Steve Sang-Hyun Noh) has been arrested for suspected treason against the emperor. In the present, Solomon (Jin Ha) details the failed deal and his firing to his father (Soji Arai). With little to no other options, he shares that he’s interested in getting into the pachinko business with Yoshii. However, Mozasu wants better for his son than a seedy future.

After a trip to the station, Sunja connects with woman from Isak's congregation. She refers Sunja to Hasegawa, a secret Communist who might be able to provide some insight. Sunja explains, by way of Noa's translations, what exactly Isak's arrest means for her family but before she and her son can leave, law enforcement raid the secret meeting.



Mari Yamamoto as Hana

Hana encourages Solomon to stop feeling sorry for himself and to take everything he seeks out. Solomon then meets with Yoshii and proposes that Yoshii use his "ways" to convince the elderly landowner to sell her property. That way Solomon's former employers have no choice but to beg for that crucial piece of land. Yoshii agrees to the proposition and Solomon asks for one other favor. Eventually, the landowner spots a seemingly dangerous man outside her home.

Emotions come to a high when footage of Noa chasing after Isak in a police car mixes with that of Solomon bringing a bed-ridden Hana to the hospital roof to provide her with one last beautiful view of the Tokyo skyline. Sunja gifts Solomon Hansu's watch, which she first believed to be a curse but will now "save our family."



Steve Sanghyun Noh as Baek Isak.

The pocket-watch isn't all that viewers see of Hansu (Lee Minho), as he returns to accompany Noa on his way to school. Before they part ways, Hansu tells his son to "be so good they can't deny you what you're owed." He returns the pocket-watch, which Sunja previously pawned, to Noa.



Lee Minho and Jun Park

Things take an optimistic turn with Sunja selling her fresh kimchi at a bustling market to make ends meet, much to an insecure Yoseb's (Junwoo Han) dismay. Despite her limited Japanese and disgusted sneers from fellow merchants, Sunja asserts herself and convinces customers to spend what little they have on the beloved Korean side dish. Just when it seems the credits are about to roll, the finale takes a different turn.

The season ends spotlighting the real-life Sunja's, elderly *Zainichi* women. In documentary footage, they reflect on their age, their experience during Korea's tumultuous history and more.

Pachinko showrunner Soo Hugh and executive producers Michael Ellenberg and Theresa Kang-Lowe broke down the bigger themes at play in the finale, the significance behind Lee Minhoo's white suite and where a potential season 2 will go. Read the Q&A, which have been edited for length and clarity, below.

DEADLINE: *There's so much loss in this finale – with Hana's death and Isak's arrest. Why was it important to have Solomon and Sunja move forward from these moments?*

SOO HUGH: Before anything, I knew that season one had to end with Sunja at the market selling kimchi, so when you know that that's going to be your ending, it's going to feel both like a triumph for this character. No matter what our characters go through and what history throws at them – call me an idealist – I love these characters too much for us to leave them broken. That just isn't the message of this show. Our characters will triumph.

MICHAEL ELLENBERG: When you get to that [kimchi] sequence and really the whole last episode, it's when Minha starts to catch up to Yuh-jung. What I mean by that is like Young Sunja, you know, she's always intelligent, but she's a country woman, she's illiterate and does not know how the world really functions and how it really works and she's a bit of a naive. You're watching her come to understand how the world really is and her own voice in it. In this last episode, you see her take command of the situation, she has to overrule a lot of the men to get to the reality of the thing, and if she's going to survive and her children are going to survive. Then when you're coming to YJ, you're like, "Oh, I see, that's the origin story." That's when they character links up.

THERESA KANG-LOWE: I think part of it is also when you're thinking about what can Sunja do, what can a mother do, what can anyone do in that kind of a situation. I think it goes to the whole point of the show, which really it is about resilience and hope at the end of the day.

DEADLINE: *What's the larger significance of her coming to her own capabilities with her kimchi cart?*

KANG-LOWE: It's a cultural touchpoint for her that if she wasn't Korean, she wouldn't be able to do that. We all have that in our different cultures but that then becomes a way for her to provide for her family and her source of power. The ending of that definitely I attribute to her being Korean and having the means to provide for her family, but ultimately, it's about that hopefulness that this family will endure and survive. Kimchi for Asian Americans, Korean Americans is a source of pride. I think it's so amazing to have kimchi, which is such an iconic Korean part of the cuisine, be the very thing that ultimately allows Sunja to provide for her family, and I think every family in every culture has that.

DEADLINE: *This episode features different music for title sequence. What was the decision behind that?*

HUGH: When I was in Korea 3 or 4 years ago, I kept hearing this song. The song is this blend of modern-day synth with old school pansori, traditional folk singing in Korea, and it's that blend of those two sounds. This is our show, like someone took our show and made it into a pop song, which is a blending of the old and the new, both in technology, both in substance. What was so fun about doing this piece is we end this episode at the very end with first person interviews, with *Zainichi*

women, and all of us thought it was so poetic that this feels like Korea's episode. It's a title sequence song all in Korean. Michael gave us great notes because, originally, when we recorded that song a few times with Leenalchi, they did it half in English and half in Korean. The chorus is in English, but the verses were in Korean, it just wasn't working. We were trying to figure it out because they sound amazing. "We know we love this song, why is it not working?" and Michael was like, maybe it should just all be in Korean, and it really was the magic sauce.

DEADLINE: *What exactly does Hana's death represent for Solomon?*

HUGH: What I thought was just really beautiful about their relationship and the way we say goodbye to Hana is it also felt like saying a goodbye to Solomon's childhood. In terms of the person that he has to become in season two has to let go of that past, and that's really one of the messages of the show. You can either let that past be a strength for you, right, like when Sunja thinks about her past, she thinks about her father, he's an anchor point, it makes her stronger. I think Solomon is missing that, so I think he really needs to start building a life of his own and stop living with the burdens of that. I think Solomon is in for a very different journey in a possible season two.

ELLENBERG: Both Sunja and Solomon are shedding skins. Her's is more joyous, right, it feels like more inherently triumphed, and his, we don't really know what's next for him, but his origin story, in a way, is complete now. Everything going forward is he Korean? Is he Japanese? Is he American? He doesn't really know, at the end of this, what his actual real identity is or who he can trust beyond his father and grandmother. I think there's a kind of grey parallel between the two of them, and so Soo's structure means goodbye to Hana in this way that it's fundamental in a way Isak is taken from Sunja. It's a similar kind of notion of a key foundational relationship is broken, and they're going to now figure out who they really are.

DEADLINE: *Is it safe to say that in season two, we're going to get more of that self-exploration for Solomon?*

HUGH: Yeah. We always said the way the time works in this show, the past just goes like rocket fire. Sunja's story moves through 80 years in a blink of an eye. Solomon is our clay, we're going to watch that molding, and then, now, let's take that scalpel, and we're going to form a human being so that by the time we finish, we see, hopefully, someone we actually love and understand. That love and understanding is a process.

DEADLINE: *Who is it that shows up to the landowners gate?*

HUGH: I think we have to see that story fully out in season two, which is Solomon's made a deal with the devil. How he's going to actually go through with it is one of the things we'll explore in season two. We also know that the story about Japan in the bubble economy in 1989, we know that bubble is bursting, we know that it's coming, so there is definitely a darker shade to that scene, so hopefully, we'll see her again.

DEADLINE: *We also see Hansu come back in the season one finale to finally meet his son. What's the larger story behind that?*

HUGH: It is my favorite Hansu scene of the season, period, and I think my favorite Min-Ho performance of the season. To see him back in that white suit that is history repeating itself. He once wowed Sunja in that white suit, and now he's going to wow his son. How could Hansu have stayed away? This is his son, this is the one who is going to legitimize everything for him. What I loved about that scene with little Noa is you see him trying to be strong and be stern, but at the end of the day, you see the love in his eyes. This man is capable of redemption, the question is whether or not he deserves it. That's really his story for the future seasons.

DEADLINE: How did the documentary aspect of the finale come about?

HUGH: Jackie Kim, who did the interviews, she's a historian, and I think she's one of my personal heroes. She's really spent most of her career trying to make sure that the first-person testimonies of this generation are captured. I always thought the interviews were going to come at the end of the fourth season, that was how we were going to close out the entire series, and then I just started to get very anxious about whether or not we were going to get four seasons, but also, these women are, you know, one is 102 years old, we don't know how many years we have left with these wonderful people.

Covid threw a huge wrench into whether or not we were going to be able to shoot them, and then, funny enough, we told Jackie, "You know, Jackie, not only are you like this brilliant historian, we're now going to make you a camera person." So she went in, and she operated the camera and got those interviews.

KANG-LOWE: We really wanted to show that there are real Sunjas. This is not a historical piece. A lot of the intention of the show was to make the past feel as alive and real as the present and what other better way to show the real-life women who lived their own kinds of lives like these?

DEADLINE: Are there any specific plot points you were looking to explore for Sunja, Hansu or any others in Season 2?

HUGH: I'm excited about three things in season two. In season two, Kyunghee (Eun-chae Jung) I think she comes into her own as just her own person and her own being, and she's just one of my favorite characters in this story, so I would love, love to see that. The brotherhood between Mozasu and Noa, I think because they're so young in season one, we don't get a capture, but in season two, that brotherhood is just magical. Then season two, we see a reunion that is my favorite reunion in the book.

If I said a name, that is a spoiler.

KANG-LOWE: I think where we're going in season two, the stakes get even bigger and it's actually even more dramatic because what happens is you see with occupation how something is coming towards everyone in Korean-based families. What happens in season two is the scale grows and the stakes get even higher. I can't tell you more than that, but I can tell you... we always say that season one is epic. Season two it gets to an even greater place of epic-ness in scale.

Soo is talking in the writers' room about the third generation actually. I can't promise where we'll actually end up in the show, but the third generation is definitely something that we were talking about. I think you'll be pleased.

DEADLINE: Have you given any thought into which directors you'd like to bring in for Season 2?

HUGH: We were all spoiled with Justin [Chon] and [Kogonada]. They set the bar so high, but I think what we know for sure is that the personal is the thing that gets you into the show, that regardless of who ends up helming season two or a possible season two, they have to feel this in their bones.

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