

# The Lobster (2015)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 59 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 4; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 4.5

*Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes...*

*Isaiah 10:1*

Although it might not seem like science fiction Greek writer-director Yorgos Lanthimos' film is certainly a dystopian tale. There is no space travel or fancy machines—just an oppressive society that has devolved into one that will not tolerate singleness. Single people are sent to The Hotel where they have 45 days to find a mate. If they fail to do so they will be transformed into an animal of their choice. In the midst of this setting the director/co-writer has given us one of the most unusual—or should I say bizarre—love stories to grace our screens in a long time!

David's (Colin Farrell) wife has left him for another man, so, along with his pet dog, he is sent to the Hotel. During his entrance interview we see what a dark absurdist comedy this parody of our society's obsessiveness with coupling is. The stark Hotel Manager (Olivia Colman) asks what kind of an animal he prefers should he fail to find another mate. When she asks why he chooses a lobster he replies that it is because a lobster lives a long life and remains sexually active to the end. He also explains that the dog he insists on keeping with him is his brother. He had been a guest at the Hotel but had failed.

He enters the dining room and finds a seat in the Singles

section. At the other end sit the Couples, all looking far happier than those dining alone. Except when needing it for manipulating his silverware, he keeps his left hand behind his torso, like the others, to show the difficulty in being single.

At nightly group meetings skits are given to show the drawbacks of being single. One of them features a woman walking alone who is attacked and raped. In the follow-up she is walking with a companion, and the would-be rapist lets them pass by. During the day the guests go on hunts for runaways who have escaped into the forest that surrounds the Hotel. If they shoot one with their dart rifles, they are given an extra day to find a mate.

David soon becomes friends with Limping Man (Ben Whishaw) and Lisping Man (John C Reilly) They survey the females for possible match-ups –the young Nosebleed Woman (Jessica Barden), the eager Biscuit Woman (Ashley Jensen), and the standoffish Heartless Woman (Aggeliki Papoulia). Note that only David is given a name.

The rules require that they must have something in common—strong interests or share a physical problem. They also must never masturbate during their stay. Lisping Man was caught, and his hand was burned as a punishment. Limping Man is drawn to Nosebleed Woman, so he bashes his nose against a table top so that he will have something in common, and they become a couple, now moved at mealtime to the Couples' section of the dining room. If they can stay together for the allotted time, they will be sent on a vacation aboard a yacht. The Hotel manager explains that if they should argue then, they will be assigned children because that usually fixes things.

Failing to find bliss with Heartless Woman, the desperate David flees to the forest where the group of Loners encounter him. Their leader (Lea Seydoux) is a cruel woman whose basic rule is just the reverse of society's. Anyone caught trying to

pair up with someone is severely punished. However, David is soon drawn to Short Sighted Woman (Rachel Weisz) because he shares her vision problem. The would-be lovers thus eventually find themselves caught between two warring worlds.

This strange and compelling parable should evoke plenty of discussion, given our society's obsession with pairing off its members. How many singles happy with their present state have had to endure at family gatherings and weddings such remarks as, "Well when are you going to find the right (girl or man)?" In a way this film is the exact opposite of the values espoused by the Greek family in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. A singles or adult group is ideal for discussing this film because the church has so often overstressed the Genesis sentiment, "It is not good for man to be alone." The companionship of Proverbs 4:9 also often used to pressure singles into marrying—this will be a passage you might think of while watching the two skits at the Hotel intended to demonstrate the drawbacks of being alone. If you enjoy satire, you will find this dark comedy a real hoot!

*This review with a set of discussion questions is in the June issue of VP.*