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Suck Me Shakespeare (Fack ju Göhte): Film Review

12:17 PM PST 11/18/2013 by Boyd van Hoeij

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The Bottom Line

Outrageous antics plus sweet romance and good actors makes for a winner.

Opens

Nov. 7 (in Germany)

Director

Bora Dagtekin

Cast

Elyas M'Barek, Karoline Herfurth, Katja Riemann

Turkish-German director Bora Dagtekin and star Elyas M'Barek reteam for another winner, following their hit TV series "Turkish for Beginners" and its 2012 cinema spin-off.

LUXEMBOURG -- A criminal who can barely spell is forced to become a substitute teacher in *Suck Me Shakespeare (Fack ju Göhte)*, the new comedy from Turkish-German director **Bora Dagtekin** and star **Elyas M'Barek**, whose hit TV series *Turkish for Beginners* inspired the eponymous 2012 box-office smash.

The German title is a phonetic transcription of *F*ck You, Goethe* and immediately suggests the protagonist's poor spelling as well the film's school environment and irreverent tone. This story of a newly-released convict who becomes the world's worst

teacher in order to get to his buried loot consists of too many stand-alone set pieces and is, at almost two hours, definitely too long. But the rapid-fire dialogue, the amusingly over-the-top acting and antics, and the great chemistry of M'Barek and female lead **Karoline Herfurth** (reunited after 2001's hit comedy *Girls on Top*) ensure audiences will nonetheless have a pretty good time.

The film's \$9 million local opening was the best score for a German film this year and second-biggest opening of 2013 and could also interest producers looking for *Bad Teacher*-inspired remake ideas.

Zeki Mueller (M'Barek) was in jail for 13 months, just enough time for Goethe High to construct a new gym on the exact spot where Zeki's stripper friend, Charlie (**Jana Pallaske**), buried his loot. In order to get regular access to the school's basement, from where he hopes to drill a tunnel to his spoils, Zeki takes on a job as a substitute teacher offered to him by the prim principal (**Katja Riemann**, in a delicious cameo), who is one teacher short after one of her staff (**Uschi Glas**) had been so maltreated by her students, she jumped from a second-floor window, shouting "They're all monsters!"

Nevermind that Zeki has no teaching certificate or any accurate knowledge of German (his mangling of the correct gender and cases is a running gag). Of course, Mueller finds himself teaching a class that's full of horrible teenage monsters indeed, who devise booby traps that have nothing on the work of seasoned special-ops soldiers. By dialing the film's tone way past hysterical -- and at times, hysterically funny -- from the start, Dagtekin succeeds in creating an atmosphere in which anything goes, but as in his previous work, he does ensure that the characters remain recognizable, even if their personalities have been greatly enlarged to augment the laughs.

Mueller's main foil is the bespectacled good girl Lisi (Herfurth, M'Barek's equal on all fronts), a fellow teacher who went to Goethe High as a teen. Her behavior is as saintly as Zeki's profane; where she gets all worked up when someone chews gum in class or uses an inappropriate word, her against-all-odds love interest does nothing but smoke, drink, swear, flip the bird, push one kid's head under water or shoot another -- and that's when he's teaching. Their sweet rapport is a nice antidote to much of the gross-out, caricature-like humor, and the occasional injection of highbrow references, such as a ditz blonde student who's called **Chantal Akerman**, is further proof that Dagtekin is a master at blending different registers. He's equally apt at balancing the story of the protagonists with that of the impressive lineup of supporting players, who are all clever variations on clichés and are played by the impressive ensemble.

Though many scenes, which editors **Charles Ladmiral** and **Zaz Montana** punchily string together, work fine in their own right, not all of them snugly fit into the film's larger story arcs, with the writer-director at times repeating himself, such as an unnecessary second school excursion or a trip to Charlie's strip club.

An updated version of the world's most famous school play, *Romeo and Juliet*, is good for the film's biggest belly laugh. Combined with the English-language pop songs on the soundtrack, it injects the proceedings with a sense of Anglo-Saxon cool. Visually, the film's dominant colors are pink and cobalt blue, further underlining that this tale is set in an alternate universe.

Production companies: Rat Pack Filmproduktion, Constantin Film Produktion
Cast: Elyas M'Barek, Karoline Herfurth, Katja Riemann, Alwara Hoefels, Jana Pallaske, Uschi Glas, Anna Lena Klenke, Max von der Groeben, Jella Haase, Aram Arami, Gizem Emre, Farid Bang
Writer-Director: Bora Dagtekin

Producers: Christian Becker, Lena Schoemann
Co-producer: Martin Moszkowicz
Director of photography: Christof Wahl
Production designers: Matthias Muesse, Christian Schaeffer
Music: Michael Beckmann
Costume designer: Regina Tiedeken
Editors: Charles Admiral, Zaz Montana
No rating, 118 minutes.

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