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Film adaptations of Shakespeare’s works are certainly nothing new, nor is the concept of placing the Bard’s characters and scenarios in modern or outlandish settings. However, it’s rare to find his literary stalwarts both dwelling in the present and as creatures of the night, which is the entire basis for ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE UNDEAD, which begins its limited theatrical release today from Indican Pictures.

Set in New York City, ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE UNDEAD follows Julian (Jake Hoffman) as he struggles to make ends meet, living in the back of his father’s medical practice and still pining for his ex-girlfriend Julia (Devon Aoki). Things appear to come together when Julian lands the job of directing an off-Broadway production of HAMLET. Unbeknownst to Julian, this outlandish version of the story has been penned by master vampire Theo Horace (played to delightfully corny perfection by John Ventimiglia) in an effort to lure the actual Hamlet—also one of the undead—out of hiding. It sounds ridiculous, and indeed it is, but ultimately the film is so much fun that silliness of the plot is easily forgiven.

The cast is, quite simply, terrific. Hoffman (son of Dustin) lends an authentic air to the shiftless, womanizing Julian, still smitten with his ex yet determined not to show it. As he takes the directing job at his father’s behest, Hoffman manages to keep Julian believable and mostly level-headed as things spiral wildly out of control, with vampires, jealous boyfriends and mystical orders continually harassing him as opening night draws ever nearer. Kris Lemche, as Julian’s best friend Vince, is a delightful contrast to our hero, and it’s a shame when he falls prey to Theo and his minions after being cast in the play’s lead role. As Julia, who’s first seen dating alleged mobster Bobby Bianchi (Ralph Macchio—!) and then falls for Theo after being

cast as Ophelia, Aoki is decent, but falls flat next to the performances of Hoffman and Ventimiglia.

More notable acting contributions come from Jeremy Sisto as a bumbling detective, Geneva Carr as the lone representative of a secret order intent on finding the Holy Grail and Macchio as the mobster/businessman trying to give hand sanitizer a macho makeover. Honestly, some of the cameos outshine the main cast at a few key moments. The score is also noteworthy, if only for the fact that it was composed by one Sean Lennon. Overall, the music blends well with the scenes and never clashes with the mood being conveyed, but for all the hype over Lennon’s presence, it feels like there should be more to it.

ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE UNDEAD begins its big-screen play at the Village East Cinemas in New York City (where the flick was filmed in its entirety), with more locations to be announced. It’s a funny, interesting and rather unique take on the famous play, and definitely worth checking out. If you enjoy a tongue-in-cheek vampire flick or alternative takes on the Shakespeare’s works, UNDEAD will make for an enjoyable evening at the movies.

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