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Sokurov Completes Power Series With 'Faust' Film

By REUTERS

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VENICE, Italy (Reuters) - Acclaimed Russian director Alexander Sokurov returns to the theme of corrupting power in his new film "Faust," the fourth and final part of a series on the topic but the first to depict a fictional character.



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The first three movies in the tetralogy were "Moloch" (1999) about Adolf Hitler, "Taurus" (2000) about Vladimir Lenin and "The Sun" (2005) about Emperor Hirohito.

Faust, which has its world premiere at the Venice film festival on Thursday, is loosely based on German writer Goethe's take on the myth about a man who sells his soul to the devil.

It is one of 23 movies in the main competition lineup, and eligible for prizes including the coveted Golden Lion for best film at the closing ceremony on Saturday.

In Sokurov's Faust, the Mephistopheles character is convincingly portrayed by Anton Adasinsky as a creepy, old, grotesque moneylender who struggles to maintain his grip on Faust.

"The tyrants in the previous films of the tetralogy saw themselves as God's representatives on Earth, but they made an unpleasant discovery: they are only human," read a commentary in production notes for the movie handed to journalists.

"In Faust, the reverse is the case: a man is turned into an idol before our very eyes. Faust's triumphal march around the world is only beginning as the film closes.

"He walks off in order to become a tyrant, a political leader, an oligarch ... Is it a coincidence that the film maker interrupts this journey?"

The action of the German-language Faust is set in the 19th century in a town of narrow streets, teeming squares and dark tunnels.

The screen is drained of color as Faust and the moneylender set out to seduce the beautiful and innocent Margarete, despite having killed her brother in a bar brawl.

Stench and filth are never far away, from the opening scene featuring the scientist Faust gouging the heart from a corpse to the hideously flabby moneylender defecating in a church.

Sokurov told reporters in Venice that the movie could have been even more grim.

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"Many scenes I set aside because I thought they were too extreme, insisting on horror and ugliness," the 60-year-old film maker said, speaking through a translator.

"But this story talks about man, the history of man and the story of an individual, his fears and apprehensions and the eternal opportunity of man to betray.

"We have to delve into everything that is dark in man."

Toward the end Faust takes on a more heroic dimension as he sets out across a vast vista of mountains and glaciers where the possibilities seem endless.

Sokurov said his Faust had more in common with the likes of Hitler and Lenin than would at first appear to be the case.

"A love of words that are easy to believe and pathological unhappiness in everyday life," said Sokurov. "Evil is reproduceable, and Goethe formulated its essence: 'Unhappy people are dangerous'."

(Reporting by Mike Collett-White, editing by Paul Casciato)

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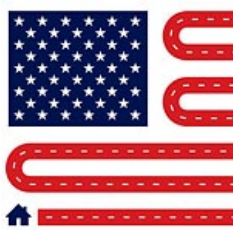
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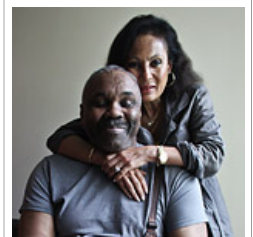
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