

## My Sassy Girl (Yeopgijeogin geunyeo) - 2001

Starring: Jeon Ji-hyun, Cha Tae-hyeon

Director: Kwak Jae-yong

Availability: Hong Kong-import VCD and DVD (Region 3), Korean import DVD (Region 3)

Rating:



**My Sassy Girl poster** (image courtesy of Mirovision)

During the summer of 2001, South Korean moviegoers went crazy for the romantic comedy "My Sassy Girl". By year's end, it had become the second-highest grossing film for 2001 (just behind the gangland saga "Friend"), and had earned a place in the record books as the highest grossing homegrown comedy in the country's box office history. In February of 2002, Dreamworks SKG negotiated the U.S. remake rights for the film, joining "My Wife is a Gangster" and "Hi, Dharma" in being the very first Korean films to be picked up by Hollywood for transplantation purposes. With its easy yet unpredictable blend of laugh-out-loud broad comedy, metaphysical romance, and fun characters, "My Sassy Girl" can easily be included among the best that Korean cinema has to offer.

"My Sassy Girl" is based on an on-line serial written by Kim Ho-sik that detailed his relationship with his off-the-wall college girlfriend. This was eventually compiled into a best-selling book and caught the attention of director Kwak Jae-yong, who wrote the script for the film. The story kicks off with college student Kyun-woo (Korean pop singer Cha Tae-hyun, in his feature film debut) crossing paths



**Cha Tae-hyeon and Jeon Ji-hyun**  
(image courtesy of Mirovision)

## Chapter 4: Ten Korean Films Everyone Should See

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with a drunk girl (Jeon Ji-hyun) on a late-night subway. Just before she passes out, the girl looks at Kyun-woo and calls him 'honey'. The other passengers, assuming him to be the hapless girl's boyfriend, demand that Kyun-woo look after her. After carrying her on his back for what seems to be miles, Kyun-woo drops the girl off at a motel. But instead of leaving her and getting on his way, Kyun-woo finds himself intrigued by the nameless girl and vows to do whatever he can to heal her sorrow.

Unfortunately, he gets far more than he bargained as he becomes wrapped around the finger of this strange girl, whose dramatic mood swings are outmatched only by her penchant for sociopathic behavior. When they dine out and Kyung-woo orders anything but coffee, she barks her mantra "Do you wanna die?" and then promptly changes his order to coffee. When her feet begin aching from walking, she forces Kyung-woo to switch his comfortable running shoes for her high heels. And being a budding screenwriter, she demands that Kyung-woo read her wacky treatments, or suffer an ass kicking. However, despite these crazy antics (not to mention landing in jail a few times), Kyun-woo finds himself hopelessly hooked on this 'sassy girl'. And though the girl seems to relish in humiliating and belittling those around her, it becomes clear that underneath the brash exterior is a wounded soul who holds a genuine affection for Kyun-woo.

This cleverly scripted comedy covers a lot of territory in its two-hour running time, containing enough material for at least two movies. The film's first half (a fact that is irreverently highlighted with a big bold pastel-colored title) deals with Kyung-woo's initial misadventures with the 'sassy girl' and the absurdity he faces in her company. In addition to the obvious comic set-pieces revolving around the girl's anti-social tendencies, Kwak has some fun visualizing her female-centered film



**Cha Tae-hyeon and Jeon Ji-hyun** (*image courtesy of Mirovision*)

treatments, such as "Demolition Terminator", featuring a female warrior from the future gunning down bad guys à la "The Matrix", or a martial arts drama that mocks Wong Kar-wai's "Ashes of Time". Another great gag has Kyung-woo being instructed to drop off her treatment at Shin Cine (the production company behind "My Sassy Girl") and making the suggestion that box office draws Han

## Chapter 4: Ten Korean Films Everyone Should See

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Suk-yu and Shim Eun-ha (“Christmas in August”, “Tell Me Something”) be cast in the lead roles.

However, as the film moves into its second half (declared with more pastel-colored lettering) and even overtime (check), the bottled-up emotions and vulnerable side of the 'sassy girl' start to reveal themselves, and the film moves into more melodramatic territory, reflecting the growing maturity of the two lead characters. The film even takes a riff from the ever-popular 'love across time' genre (which includes "Failan") as the would-be lovers spend some time apart and are reunited by an unexpected and clever plot twist. Despite the more serious mood of this latter half, Kwak manages to avoid the melancholic overkill that permeates the typical Korean romance, while still providing a strong emotional footing for the story.



**Cha Tae-hyeon and Jeon Ji-hyun**  
*(image courtesy of Mirovision)*

If there is one really good reason to watch "My Sassy Girl", it would have to be Jeon Ji-hyun's turn as the film's unnamed heroine. From her unforgettable first appearance as a wasted commuter, to her rambunctious bullying of Kyun-woo, to the heartbreak she wears on her sleeve, Jeon displays an unparalleled level of enthusiasm and dramatic range in portraying a young woman whose domineering exterior is but a smokescreen for her own vulnerability-- it is almost difficult to believe that this same actress who played the quiet and introspective Kim Eun-ju in "Il Mare". As her opposite, the likable Cha Tae-hyeon is the perfect comic foil/underdog for Jeon's bundle of untamed energy, and his 'constipated' facial expression, when faced with one of her 'outbursts', is priceless.

Like the best Korean films, "My Sassy Girl" is a genre-bending exercise that throws in elements of the teen comedy, the traditional melodramatic romance, and even some genre parody and blends them into a unique cinematic experience that defies categorization. The film's original Korean title, Yeopgi, which means 'novelty-seeking', is in reference to the youth craze that was started by Kim Ho-sik's original Internet postings about his eccentric girlfriend. Though the English title for this film doesn't mean quite the same thing, it certainly does convey what to expect.