

# SYSTEM CRASHER (Systemsprenger)

Germany (2019) 120 minutes

**Director:** Nora Fingscheidt

**Cast:** Bernadette 'Benni' Klaass (Helena Zengel)  
Michael 'Micha' Heller (Albrecht Schuch)  
Frau Bafané (Gabriela Maria Schmeide)  
Bianca Klaass (Lisa Hagmeister)



**Screening 02 March 2022 at Swindon Arts Centre**

## Synopsis

She is small, but dangerous. Wherever Benni ends up, she is immediately expelled. The wild 9-year-old girl has already become what child protection services call a "system crusher". And she is certainly not looking to change her ways. Because Benni has one single goal: to be back at home with her mummy.

## Reviews



A brilliant performance by the child at the centre of German drama *System Crasher* saves this otherwise frantic and spuriously plotted film about the limits of the care system.

Eleven-year-old Helena Zengel (who was nine when she made it) is incredibly assured as the tomboyish Benni, a violently out-of-control child lashing out at everyone who gets in her way as she's bounced around foster homes waiting for her mother to get her act together. In synch with Benni, the film is edited together at a furious pace, with frequent flash-cuts to some traumatic incident from her past adding to a general feeling of discombobulation that seems designed to mirror Benni's broken psyche. But while writer/director Nora Fingscheidt should be commended for not stacking the decks in her protagonist's favour here – if this was a Ken Loach film, all Benni's caseworkers would be heartless middle-class monsters – her decision to zero in on Benni's burgeoning relationship with Micha, a young social worker with a self-confessed saviour complex, stretches credulity as he takes her on intimate camping trips and invites him into her home without raising any institutional red flags.

*Alistair Harkness, The Scotsman*

The heart of the film's notable brush with discontentment is fabulously demonstrated by Zengel's rebellious performance as the damaged Benni screeching at what appears to be an indifferent world not acknowledging her instilled hurting. The demons are marvellously on display contained in the beleaguered Benni. The expressive physical twitches and tightness that overcomes Zengel's furious face is resourcefully inspired as her walking wounded minor is a major firecracker with atom bomb-like capabilities. No doubt that Zengel's captivating turn as a demolishing doll on the edge fortifies Fingscheidt's foster care fable into a masterful commentary on societal instability for the helpless infringed.

Racy and unrestrained, *System Crasher* is a child care chiller that manages to be an indescribable kind of horror show that the kiddies may not be allowed to screen before bedtime. However, for Zengel's bombastic Benni, she is the salaciously moody Shirley Temple headlining this kid-unfriendly creepshow in all its revealing skin.

*Frank Ochieng, Flickfeast*

## Film Facts

- Helena Zengel became the youngest actress ever in history to win the Lola for "Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role" at the German Film Awards for her performance in this film.
- Nora Fingscheidt wrote the screenplay after five years of research during which she lived or worked in residential groups, in a school for educational support, an emergency accommodation centre and a child psychiatry unit. She talked to staff at institutions and agencies as well as child and youth psychologists. Fingscheidt says she made *System Crasher* to raise awareness of severely traumatised children like Benni.
- The film was Germany's official submission to the International Feature Film category of the 92nd Academy Awards.