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Adventures of a Dentist (SOVIET-B&W)

V. Miagkov — 7-5-78
Moscow, June 10.

A Mosfilm Production, Moscow; world rights, Goskino, Moscow. Features entire cast. Directed by Elem Klimov. Screenplay, Alexander Volodin; camera (black & white) S. Rubashkin; sets, V. Kamsky, B. Blank; music, A. Shnitke. Reviewed at Goskino, Moscow, June 9, '78. Running time: 90 MINS.

Cast: Andrei Miagkov, B. Vasilyeva, A. Freyndlikh, P. Krymov, I. Kvasha.

"Adventures of a Dentist" combined two leading Soviet talents for original comedy and critical satire: filmmaker Elem Klimov and playwright-scripter Alexander Volodin (pseudonym for Alexander Lifshits). The film reportedly took a while in coming — perhaps due to Klimov's prior film-satire, "Welcome" (1964), and Volodin's play, "The Factory Girl" (1957), both of which produced a wave of pro-and-contra controversy in the Soviet Union.

Problems of ethics and morality concern both artists. They take strong stances against conformity, routine, dehumanizing aspects of contemporary society, which deaden spiritual forces in life. The script was not immediately approved, and pic seems to be a truncated version of the original.

"Adventures of a Dentist" concerns an exceptionally gifted dentist: coming directly from his graduating class to a provincial town, he suddenly discovers he can pull teeth painlessly, indeed miraculously, and is a success overnight. This, of course, creates problems. Everyone wants to go to the painless dentist, and his colleague, a lady dentist, is without work altogether. The day comes when an investigating commission arrives on the scene — our hero refuses to pull a tooth because he decides he doesn't want to rock the boat.

His miraculous powers also get him into trouble. Besides the notoriety, our shy hero is in love — he resolves to seek a new profession. A friend, however, comments, "The most important thing is not to be dependent on other people's opinions." As a dental teacher now, his new colleagues urge him to practice again. The showdown comes when a dental-school student under his direction ends up pulling a tooth exactly in the way he did. The main thing in life apparently, is to believe strongly in something after all.

Pic as light entertainment has plenty of visual gags to carry the story on its own terms. The allegorical aspects apply to Western audiences as well as in the Soviet Union. Andrei Miagkov (a Klimov discovery) is a find as the dentist credits are top grade, and pic is ripe for Soviet Film Weeks. —*Holl.*