

Document Citation

Title	The alchemist and the virgin
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1999 Feb 22
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	70
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Az alkimista és a szûz (The alchemist and the virgin), Kamondi, Zoltán, 1998

THE ALCHEMIST AND THE VIRGIN

(DRAMA — HUNGARIAN-POLISH)

A Magyar TV-Dialog Studio-Eurofilm Studio (Budapest) - Tor Film Studio (Warsaw) co-production. (International sales: S-media 2000/Profil-M 94, Budapest.) Produced by Jolan Arvai, Karoly Makk, Peter Miskolczi. Executive producers, Joel Farges, Iwona Ziulkowska.

Directed, written by Zoltan Kamondi. Camera (color), Gabor Medvigy; editor, Zsuzsa Posan; music, Laszlo Melis; production designer, Marton Agh, Attila F. Kovacs; costume designer, Kriszta Berzsenyi. Reviewed at Hungarian Film Week, Budapest, Feb. 8, 1999. Original title: *Az Alkimista Es A Szus*. Running time: 97 MIN.

With: Mariusz Bonazewski, Eszter Onodi, Danuta Zafarska, Norbert Novenyi, Peter Haumann, Janos Szirtes.

Some interesting ideas are featured in this ambitious but ultimately muddled meller, which is fatally compromised by writer-director Zoltan Kamondi's uncertainties in style and tone. Neither a sci-fi thriller, a black comedy nor an erotic melodrama, but a bit of each and more, the film is fundamentally unbelievable and, in the end, becomes both excessively violent and tedious. Prospects are very slim.

Polski actor Mariusz Bonazewski plays Sziraki, a handsome science professor and inveterate womanizer seeking the solution to the age-old problem of the alchemists — how to make gold. When he starts a relationship with Esztena, an eager teenage virgin nicely played by Eszter Onodi, he discovers the magic ingredient his research lacked — virginity — and he does, indeed, manage to create gold, though the metal disintegrates after several hours. Meanwhile Esztena's burly would-be lover Maci (Norbert Novenyi), a pro fighter, seeks revenge on the man who exploited his g.f. Pic builds to an unexpectedly ugly scene. This mixture of mysticism, magic, horror, sex and comedy never gels, and despite lush production values, the film flounders accordingly.

Varney 2/28-28/27 David Stratton