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AMOK

(FRENCH)

An AB Films (France)/MGN (Portugal)/NEF Filmproduktion (Germany) co-production. (Intl. sales: Claude Nouchi, WMF.) Produced by Frédéric Bourboulon. Executive producer, Agnes Le Pont. Directed by Joel Farges. Screenplay by Dominique Rousset, Catherine Fousadier, Farges, from Stefan Zweig's story. Camera (color), Fabio Conversi; editor, Luce Grunenwaldt; music, Nicola Piovani; set design, Danka Semenowicz; costumes, Claire Fraisse; sound, Bernard Aubouy; associate producers, Tino Navarro (MGN), François Duplat (NEF). Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (market section), May 15, 1993. Running time: 85 MIN.

The Woman Fanny Ardant
Dr. Steiner Andrzej Seweryn
The Traveler Bernard Le Coq
The Lover Joaquim De Almeida

"Amok" is a well-intentioned but occasionally clumsy adaptation of a Stefan Zweig story about a once-respected German doctor whose misguided pride and obsessive love for a French woman in the Portuguese West Indies leads to ruin. Exotic locations, Andrzej Seweryn's lead perf and an okay turn by Fanny Ardant make the pic suitable for international TV sales and video.

In March of 1939, during the sluggish boat journey from Goa to Cochin in Southern India, scruffy, liquor-guzzling Dr. Steiner (Seweryn) confides the tragic tale of his downfall — in flashback — to a traveler en route back to Europe (Bernard Le Coq).

Disgraced for embezzling from a German hospital, reformed ladies' man Steiner had put in years manning a remote clinic in the Portuguese colonies when Fanny Ardant appeared, an arrival that also spins the somewhat stilted and literary pic into a much more compelling mode.

Ardant's hubby, a Portuguese diplomat, has been in Europe on business for five months. Alas, Ardant is three months pregnant. She offers Steiner a fortune for a discreet abortion. Dazzled by the sight of a white woman after so long, he makes a crude counter-offer. Their relationship goes downhill from there.

Fearing the consequences of a back alley abortion, hopelessly smitten Steiner tries to redeem himself but ends up going "amok" — a frenzy brought on by palm liquor and tropical heat. Awkward coda implies that Europe, too, had gone amok in 1939.

Thesps lend approximately the right tone but can't give the story the haunting depth it requires. Nicola Piovani's hearty scores sometimes stands out more than it should. Good period production design plays up locations in India and Portugal. — *Lisa Nesselson*