



**AZUR & ASMAR: THE PRINCES' QUEST** is an LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that feature animation.

**12 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**France 2006 color 99 minutes subtitled / dubbed in English feature animation fantasy Mac Guff Ligne / Studio 0 / France 3 Cinéma / Rhône-Alpes Cinéma / Artemis Productions / Nord-ouest Productions / Zahorimédia / Intuitions Films / Lucky Red / Eurimages / Canal + / TPS Star / Centre National de la Cinematographie / La Region Ile de France / Cofimage / 6 / Confinova 2 / Soficinema / Wild Bunch Producers: Christophe Rossignon, Philip Boeffard, Jacques Bled**

**Points:**

**Direction: Michel Ocelot English-Version: George Roubicek**

**0 Editing**

**1 Animation Camera**

**0 Lighting**

**1 Script and Dialogue: Michel Ocelot**

**2 Music: Gabriel Yared\***

**Music Supervisor: Jean Pierre Arquié Music Editor: Rene Ameline**

**Music Mixer: Peter Corbin Music Recording: Andrew Dudman**

- Songs: Souad Massi\***
- 2 Production Designer and Set Decorator: Anne-Lise Lourdelet Koehler\***  
**Layouts: Eric Serre**
- 1 Animation: Frederick Brault, Etienne Pecheux, Laurent de la Chapelle**
- 2 Sound: Thomas Desjonqueres, Cyril Holtz**  
**Sound Editor: Thomas Desjonqueres**  
**Sound Effects: Nicholas Becker, Felipe Amouroux**  
**Sound Recordists: Didier LeSage, Jean-Christophe Jule**  
**Sound Remixing / Rerecording: Cyril Holtz**
- 1 Voice Acting**
- 2 Creativity**
- 12 total points**

**Voices Cast: Steven Kyman (Azur), Nigel Pilkington (Asmar), Suzanna Nour (Jehane, mother of Azur and Asmar), Nigel Lambert (Crapoux), Leopold Benedict (Azur as a child), Frederick Benedict (Asmar as a child), Imogen Bailey (Princess Chamsous Sabah), Emma Tate (The Djinn Fairy), Suzanne David (The Elf Fairy, her cousin), Sean Barrett (Wise Man Yadou), Keith Wickham\* (Father of Azur), others**

**An original fantasy resembling a story from the Arabian Nights collection, AZUR & ASMAR blends elements of traditional quests with a thematic message of universal brotherhood transcending racial and religious differences.**

**It opens with a lullaby sung to two infants by a woman known to one as Nanny and to the other as Mummy. Yet the singer refers to both as her sons. An awkward relationship with Azur's father is the root of their problem. Because dark-skinned Asmar has a different sire, he is treated as a servant's child, of little significance, a charity case. Still, as the two boys mature, they are clothed, fed, and sheltered by the anonymous man employing the widowed Jehane as wet nurse for his own child.**

**At last he decides to separate the two boys, an action resulting from their incessant scrapping over which one is superior.**

**Azur he provides with tutoring. The boy receives instruction in dancing, fencing, and riding. These special treatments are wasted on him, for he is awkward and uninterested. Spectator Asmar, however, absorbs these lessons well from a distance.**

**Seeing Azur has no hope of ever reaching desired potential while deflating, jeering Asmar is present, his father packs him off to a distant city in charge of a new tutor. Inexplicably, he then discharges the boy's mother and Asmar, leaving them nothing but clothes they are wearing. This episode is clearly analogous to Abraham's banishment of Hagar and Ishmael, though lacking jealous Sarah and thus apparently unmotivated.**

**During the childhood of both boys, their mother Jehane has indoctrinated them in the mystery of a supernatural being called The Djinn Fairy, cursed to imprisonment in a crystal cave, recalling a trapped Merlin in Arthurian lore. She can only be liberated by a suitor with a pure heart and lively intelligence, who will then marry her. The twosome will subsequently live together in complete happiness.**

**Spurred on by her fantastic tales, an adult Azur rejects his father's proposal to become a wealthy trader, electing instead to head a search-and-rescue mission dedicated to Djinn fairy liberation. Outfitted grudgingly by his dad, the young man sails off for the land beyond the sea, which has been described in great detail by his mother Jehane.**

**Swept overboard one day, Azur regains consciousness to discover he has washed ashore on a foreign beach. The natives speak a language he recognizes as that of Jehane. Unfortunately, spotting his blue eyes, they shun him as a bringer of bad luck. Starving and weary, he manages to drive a hungry dog away from the carcass on which it had been feeding, taking the animal's place and sustenance.**

**Azur is surprised the next morning to hear admiring compliments from young ladies strolling along the shore. Since his eyes are still closed in seeming slumber, the lad correctly infers feminine adoration is due to ignorance of their coloration. To survive in this place, it must be necessary to feign blindness as an excuse for not opening them. This he does, resulting in a succession of stumbles and timid preliminary foot swipes. Equipping himself with a wooden stick, Azur**

**makes the error of employing it exclusively as a crutch. Unlike a truly blind person, he doesn't employ his aid as a feeler.**

**Another fraud named Crapoux is watching close at hand. The clumsiness of Azur constantly running into palm trees and tripping over rocks sparks an inspiration. He will guide the unfortunate fellow and communicate with the locals if in return Azur carries him on his back.**

**A fellow alien in a strange land, Crapoux proposes a mutually enriching deal. Azur accepts it. Off go the odd twosome on a tour of Medina, a city which just happens to be the current residence of Asmar and his mother.**

**After a series of accidents infuriating several souk merchants, the team arrives at wealthy widow Jehane's luxurious home. Crapoux hopes she will gift them with a generous benevolence. Azur, hearing a familiar voice inside, realizes that not only is Jehane not dead, a victim of ravenous wolves as his father claimed, but very much living and considerably more affluent than at the time of their last encounter.**

**Ignoring his companion's warnings, he hammers relentlessly on the woman's door, insisting his nanny give him admittance. Perhaps to keep tranquility in the neighborhood, Jehane relents, ordering a servant to let the crazed foreigner enter.**

**Crapoux cowers outside, out of sight, only remaining in the precinct because Azur assured him Jehane will provide a reward as soon as she recognizes her visitor's true identity. By singing the nursery lullaby she once crooned to him, Azur persuades his hostess a lost child has in fact returned.**

**A feast is prepared. It is served in a magnificently appointed garden. While Azur and Jehane eat, an arrogant, unforgiving Asmar appears. The latter soon learns to his dismay Azur shares his dream of freeing the Djinn Fairy. He has come expressly for that purpose. Sharing a common interest is nettling by itself. Even worse is Jehane's overriding Asmar's selfishness. She gives Azur one of his involuntary host's outfits to wear, adding insult to unforgotten injury, each intolerable to Asmar.**

**Jehane reviews for Azur obstacles which must be overcome for a successful outcome. She urges him to visit the child-princess Chamsous Sabah, which he does.**

The girl is a cross between the Empress of Fantasia and a junior cartoon version of Audrey Hepburn's Princess Ann in *ROMAN HOLIDAY*. She conveniently is in possession of three novelties required for completion of Azur's undertaking. Chamsous Sabah had previously provided a trio of enchanted accessories to Asmar and wishes to grant Azur equal favors. She advises him to visit her own counselor, Wise Man Yadoa, who will further enlighten him about dangers involved and counter-measures.

While on a secret nocturnal outing in Medina with the princess, Azur and his temporary ward overhear a plot by wealthy merchant Wad to kill the brothers and seize a fabled treasure of the Djinn Fairy for themselves. Their first attempt on the lives of Princess Chamsous Sabah and Azur is a failure, thwarted by a clever ruse Asmar devises involving a look-alike effigy of the girl and a princely silhouette. They will try again. And again.

Which brother will win the Djinn Fairy for a bride? What will become of the other?

Created in a Paris animation studio by artisans from around the world, *AZUR & ASMAR* is a flamboyant adventure tale accompanied by an exotic Middle Eastern score composed by Gabriel Yared. Authentic instruments from the region charmingly spice melodies incorporating microtones and irregular rhythms. At several points, a stately pavane plunges auditors into a medieval context of aristocratic formality, its strict, curt measures exuding quaintness and restraint. Enunciation of words by an English dubbing cast is handled skillfully, verbal delivery enhanced by considerable diversity in vocal timbres.

Spectacularly chromatic, scintillating architectural designs dazzle the eyes as protagonists encounter a sequence of marvelous Oriental palaces, each furnished with a profusion of glittering jewels. Hand-drawn human figures move through imposing opulent structures in startling insignificance, the real heroes being background designers. Only sporadic scenes combining characters of pale complexions with soft pastel framings mar overall brilliance of décor.

Ocelot's overly schematic plotting is a definite weakness. Humorous situations frequently involve undue repetition of gags, verbal inventiveness being much less in evidence than visual creativity. Making Crapoux's Eeyore-like negativism carry twin burdens of verbal identification and recitations of East-

**West cultural differences reduces him to sour comic relief, a kind of crosspatch tutor for novice globetrotters.**

**The film's chief message of a common humanity connecting all races and creeds is highlighted repeatedly. For example, Princess Chamsous Sabah points out to Azur a church, synagogue, and mosque within her city of Medina.**

**Nonsense. It is more Istanbul or Jerusalem, where religious tolerance has some degree of acceptance. Final pairing of light-skinned Azur with dark-hued Djinn Fairy and dark-skinned Asmar with pallid Elf Fairy is pointed symbolism. European dance music and Oriental lullaby coexist in Director Michel Ocelot's dreamworld, as increasingly happens in contemporary life. Superstition which divides cultures is firmly identified as such and discounted as invalid. All these points are useful in acclimating children to a cosmopolitan planet where all countries must more than ever to survive learn lessons of tolerance and respect for each other's ways and appearances.**

**An MPAA rating of PG-13 is earned by inclusion of a nursing shot early in the narrative. Adult audiences will be as awed by the scenery as teens. AZUR & ASMAR is very strongly recommended as a reminder of how aesthetically attractive and satisfying hand-drawn animation can be to both creator and viewer.**