



LA PLANETE SAUVAGE (FANTASTIC PLANET) is an October, 2017 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Here's Kino Ken's review of that unique film.

11 of a possible 20 points

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

**Czechoslovakia / France 1968-1973 color 72 minutes dubbed / subtitled
feature fantasy animation Les Films Armorial / Argos Films / Krátký Film Praha
/ Service de la Recherche ORTF / L'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel /
Ceskoslovenský Filmexport Producers: Simon Damiani, Anatole Dauman,
Andrè Valio Cavaglione Facets DVD release**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

Direction: René Laloux

French co-production. Not so utterly unique as popularly presumed, **FANTASTIC PLANET** was thematically topical for its period, boasting a story line transplanting the plot of **PLANET OF THE APES** to Ygam, a world where instead of masters being intelligent simians they were coolly impassive blue titans oppressing relatively miniscule humans called Oms, a term seemingly derived from the French word for man or human, *l'homme*. They survived some kind of disaster on their home world of Terra, Planet Earth, only to become captives of an alien race called Draags on the remote planet of Ygam, perhaps a back-formation stemming from the word "magique." Magic is what viewers will observe in the seventy-two minutes of animation offered here by this Facets video release, a universe where survival of the fittest determined which plant and lower animal life forms endured. For rational beings, technological superiority determined status and reprieve from extinction. Docility and chance also played important roles.

The film's story derived directly from a novel by Frenchman Pierre Pairault, who, according to IMDB, employed the pseudonym of Stefan Wul to publish a series of science fiction novels. One of these was titled *Oms en serie* (*Oms Linked Together*) in English. This served as foundation for Laloux's production, though a different, more sexual climactic scene was created for the screen adaptation. In both formats, fan-eared enormous blue Draags ruled over an endangered species of small humans. The latter were divided into two categories: the feral and the domesticated. Tame Oms lived and died inside Draag communities, treated as toys or pets and regarded as minimally thoughtful. Wild oms lived in forests and periodically pilfered supplies from Draag settlements. Both types were considered nuisances guilty of generating overpopulation problems. Those strained limited resources for nourishment. To keep Oms under control, extermination campaigns were conducted via Draag proto-drones which released toxic mega-pills in hideouts populated by the subsidiary creatures. Those appeared to be nearly one hundred percent effective, with a sort of super-steamroller brigade assisting in genetic cleansing operations.

In introductory scenes a group of Draag children play with an Om mother attempting to preserve her baby from their reckless ministrations. She's

tormented by obstructing fingers until eventually being dropped to the ground, a fatal descent. The parties responsible disperse from the scene when Master Sinh appears in the distance. He apparently frowns on such “accidents.”

One dallies, however. She is the Master’s pre-teen daughter Tiwa, who has decided to ask if the orphaned Om could be taken home as her private possession. Master Sinh is agreeable, stressing her responsibilities to keep the guest away from adult meditation sessions and juvenile education lessons. Sinh supplies the infant inadvertently with a moniker when he comments on its acting like a “little terror.” Daughter Tiwa then decides to call it Terr.

Perhaps to insure audience sympathy, Terr becomes the story’s narrator. Implausibly, since there are neither obvious listeners nor infantile memories available for him.

As the boy matures, he eavesdrops on audio lectures by attaching himself to vacant earbuds on a multiple headphone set, learning as much as possible about his environment and supervisors. This activity is ended abruptly by Master Sinh, who fears knowledgeable oms will overturn the existing social structure and reverse its relationships, putting themselves into control.

Tiwa becomes an adolescent, needing to concentrate on meditation in order for graduation to a bizarre mating dance on a moon peopled by decapitated gargantuan life forms. With direction and intelligence provided by Draags, these grotesqueries regenerate visitors from Ygam, allowing perpetuation of the dominant race there.

In the meantime, Terr, still wearing a restrictive remote-controlled collar, escapes from Master Sinh’s hometown and journeys to a kind of cave between massive tree roots. Here he discovers free Oms, uneducated primitive hunters. One, a girl, undertakes to sponsor and mentor the new arrival on traditional ways of her people, including an initiatory rite involving animals resembling a cross between Mae Wests and crocodiles. These fight each other under the direction of Terr and a scoffing foe who mocks the concept of Draag tutelage. Since Terr’s battler is the more aggressive of the pair, it ultimately triumphs. That makes Terr a respected counselor to the Tree People, at least for a time. He saves a handful of them from Draag genocide plans and attempts to do the same for long-term neighboring enemies who live in a hollow log not far away.

The log-dwelling aboriginals are even more backward and superstitious than Tree counterparts. They refuse to heed Terr's warning of imminent disaster, paying the price for ignorant stubbornness with the deaths of their tribal leader and most of her followers.

Those oms which do survive are encouraged by one successful attack on a Draag, reducing the master race's numbers. They build a rocket and blast off to Ygam's moon, site of essential Draag mating rites. Apparently Draag meditations lead to nothing more profound than simple reproductive activity.

Intervening in this process, Terr and other space-travelling Oms threaten to destroy any hope of Draag propagation. Can the two species call a truce and meld?

The original intention of writers was transparently to satirize Communist dictatorship and its inevitably barren end result. No creativity or progress would ever come from such a system of governance. It would self-destruct, victim of its own mindless dependency on maintaining the status quo at all costs.

This point is still relevant today.

As animation art, LA PLANETE SAUVAGE was— and still is— fantastically beautiful. An eerily haunting, electronically distorted music track reinforced the idea of a future world intoxicated by technology at the expense of charity and tolerance. Persecution of the different evidenced by Draag conversation and policy established intolerance as a paramount virtue and goal.

One lamentably still pursued by our contemporaries, individually and on an organizational level.

Roland Topor's character designs succeeded magnificently in projecting oddity. But their freakishness estranged viewers from perceiving them as recognizable peers, diluting the film's critical message about empathy that Laloux probably wished to convey.

Lighting on the Facets release of FANTASTIC PLANET is not especially vibrant. On the other hand, sound recording is quite precise and tonally pure.

Though the picture's techniques of animation were not groundbreaking, they proved effective in reducing movement to a minimal level of distraction. Backgrounds and sonic atmosphere hold the attention rather than minutiae of articulated figures. Why takes precedence over how, leading to rumination.

The English voices cast is wide-ranging enough in vocal timbre to insure optimal differentiation between characters, with Janet Waldo's harsh-toned Hollow Log Chief and Jennifer Drake's softly mellifluous Tiwa being standouts.

Historically landmark in its adoption of a science-fiction, philosophical platform, LA PLANETE SAUVAGE is an essential viewing experience for anyone wishing to see how animation has developed and extended into new areas of content over the decades, no longer being mere entertainment for children.

Due to its plenitude of nudity, genocidal sequences, and torture scenes, the film is suitable for adult viewers only.

The Facets dvd includes several tantalizing bonuses. One is the short film LES ESCARGOTS (THE SNAIL) reviewed below.

12 of a possible 20 points

*** of a possible *****

France 1966 color 11 minutes wordless short animation horror fantasy
S.O.F.A.C. / Studios Marignan / Studio Cinemation

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points:

Direction: René Laloux
0 Editing
1 Photography
1 Lighting
1 Written by: Roland Topor, René Laloux
2 Music: Alain Goraguer*
1 Designs: Roland Topor
1 Animation: Jacques Leroux, René Laloux
2 Character Design: probably Roland Topor
1 Sound: Albert Platzman
2 Creativity
12 total points

Before essaying a feature animation, director René Laloux busied himself with producing short animations, the most famous of which is probably **LES ESCARGOTS (THE SNAILS)** from 1966. In this eleven-minute horror epic, a French farmer has difficulty growing salad greens until he discovers his tears will not only water them effectively but even propagate monstrosities sufficient to feed whole families. Unfortunately, his bumper crops attract oversize predators of the snail species. Neither particularly sluggish nor terribly appetizing, these destructive pests menace local civilization, flattening autos, devouring and sliming everything they encounter: ecdysiast, vegetables, inquisitive poppet. Trying to correct an impossibly horrific scenario, the original farmer plants carrots in devastated fields. As the film ends a different kind of forager eyes *them*. It, too, has enormous size and appetite.

Laloux and Roland Topor team with animator Jacques Leroux and composer Alain Goraguer to depict a world literally overrun by small herbivores. Here the quartet invents a unique doomsday scenario with convincingly suggestive menacing music for fans of unconventional apocalypses and doubles the fun by annihilating mankind in two consecutive massacres. Once again, as with **FANTASTIC PLANET**, content is too grim for children but quite enticing as adult screening.

Also included on the dvd are a two-minute trailer for **FANTASTIC PLANET**, subtitles, a photo gallery, a four-minute Sean Lennon loopy music video titled "Would I Be the One" fusing the sensibilities of **YELLOW SUBMARINE** and **LA PLANETE SAUVAGE**, and a twenty-six minute interview with the film director that highlights his sense of self-effacing humor and essential contributions of character designer Roland Topor to **FANTASTIC PLANET** and **LES ESCARGOTS**.