Azur&Asmar
THE PRINCES' QUEST

Interview with Anne-Lise Koehler

Head of Background Design

When you first read the screenplay of Azur & Asmar, did it immediately conjure up images in your head?

Anne-Lise Koehler: Yes. What I most liked was the power of the screenplay and the ideas in the film. I was particularly delighted as I spent part of my childhood in Morocco. I have vivid memories of those days, in addition to the things my parents and grandparents have told me. By working on this film, I realized how much I owe to North African culture which has helped to shape my taste and interests. I am also very interested in the 15th century. During this period of Western art history, artists distanced themselves from religion. They began to observe the world around them with interest and to portray it. The discovery of this screenplay was a joy in every way.

What changes did you make to the look of the mythical bird, the Saimourh?

Anne-Lise Koehler: I made its outline slender so that its flight would look more spectacular. I accentuated the contrast between the head and the body. I liked the idea of a marvelous bird with a disturbing head. I made its feathers and wings longer. The Saimourh has the head of a serpent-eater, the neck and

train of a peacock, the wings of a swallow, and the legs of a sparrowhawk. I drew my dream bird!

You are also an animal sculptor...
Anne-Lise Koehler: Yes. There are certain similarities between sculpture and animated movies. Take the example of a bird: when you animate it, you draw all the attitudes which make up its movements, then you show them in the right order to create the illusion of movement. To make a sculpture, you portray a bird which is frozen in a particular attitude, but which you can move around. Your view of the sculpture enables you to imagine and 'feel' the movement. You see the bird moving. With sculpture,
you move in space and you imagine time whereas with animation, you move in time and you imagine the space!

What are the main backgrounds you worked on?

Anne-Lise Koehler: First of all, I painted the nurse's house and the inside of Azur's mansion in France, to define the image of the French part. I also prepared the background of the palm grove in North Africa, then I sketched the film's principal color moods. During the background coloring stage, I divided the work up between us all, taking into account everyone's particular desires and talents.

Can you explain the process of creating a background from A to Z?
Anne-Lise Koehler: Each background is a special case. Sometimes I finalized backgrounds which had been sketched by other artists, or I only did a rough draft. Some were revised several times and by several people, with each stage bringing useful improvements. As a general rule, the backgrounds are line drawings to start with, then they are scanned. Then, the colors are added using a graphics palette.