

# JANUS FILMS

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## THE TIME MASTERS



Directed by visionary science-fiction animator René Laloux (*Fantastic Planet*) and designed by the legendary Jean Giraud (a.k.a. Moebius), *The Time Masters* is a visually fantastic foray into existentialist space adventure. After his parents are killed on the dangerous planet Perdide, young Piel (voiced by Frédéric Legros) survives by maintaining radio contact with Jaffar (Jean Valmont), a pilot transporting the exiled Prince Matton (Yves-Marie Maurin) and Princess Belle

(Monique Thierry) from their former kingdom. Jaffar seeks the help of Silbad (Michel Elias), a cheerful old-timer who knows how to circumvent Perdide's hazards, including brain-devouring insects and watery graves. Along the way, Jaffar and company encounter a pair of impish homunculi stowaways, identity-less angels controlled by an amorphous hive mind, and the Masters of Time, mysterious beings who can bend reality and perhaps reveal to the heroes their secret origins and destinies.

France • 1982 • 79 minutes • Color • In French with English subtitles • 1.66:1 aspect ratio

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## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*The Time Masters* (*Les maîtres du temps*, 1982) was the brainchild of French director René Laloux, who helped spearhead the burgeoning alternative animation movement in the 1960s and '70s. Laloux's first feature, *Fantastic Planet* (*La planète sauvage*, 1973), had stunned audiences with its trippy, surreal take on science fiction, and he followed up this feat by adapting another work by author Stefan Wul to the screen.

The director recruited illustrator Jean Giraud to add his unique visual stamp to the project. Since the early sixties, Giraud had established himself as an underground comics legend and, in more recent years, had begun creating wild sci-fi extravaganzas for *Métal hurlant* (*Heavy Metal* in the U.S.) and other far-out comics magazines under the pen name Moebius. Laloux asked Giraud to adapt several of Wul's novels into storyboards that would serve as the foundation for a series of animated television movies. Over time, however, the film's producers convinced Laloux to aim for a single feature. In the end, Giraud based his storyboards exclusively on Wul's *The Orphan of Perdide* (*L'orphelin de Perdide*).

Prague's Jiří Trnka Studio had animated *Fantastic Planet*, and Laloux returned to Central Europe—this time, Pannónia Stúdió in Budapest—to realize his latest vision. Pannónia had previously partnered with celebrated animators, including Marcell Jankovics, who made Hungary's first animated feature, *Johnny Corncob* (*János vitéz*, 1973); and Ferenc Rófusz, who would direct the Academy Award-winning short *The Fly* (*A légy*, 1980). What Pannónia lacked in technical precision it made up for with a modern style—and a pathbreaking adoption of computer graphics—similar to Giraud's own cutting-edge aesthetic.

It wasn't an easy process, though, as the relatively inexperienced studio struggled to stick to the fast-paced production schedule. While *Fantastic Planet* had taken several years to complete, Laloux and Jiří Trnka Studio had worked without a deadline and thus could painstakingly execute its finest details. As Fabrice Blin recounts in his book *The Fantastic Worlds of René Laloux*, the project that would become *The Time Masters* had a firm due date—and a modest budget—so Pannónia was forced to rush through its realization of Giraud's designs. The fact that Laloux and the other French crew members had to communicate with their Hungarian colleagues via interpreters only exacerbated an already tense situation.

In preparation for the film, Giraud had created hundreds of storyboards, encompassing character, costume, and background designs. He also collaborated with Laloux in adapting *The Orphan of Perdide* for the screen. (Jean-Patrick Manchette, a French crime novelist, penned the film's dialogue.) Later, Giraud wondered if the script for *The Time Masters* could have done more justice to Wul's complex narrative. The illustrator held both himself and his collaborators to the highest standards: in an interview with Numa Sadoul, he said that Pannónia didn't have the capacity to sufficiently execute his storyboards, and that the Hungarian team failed to smoothly integrate the characters into their backgrounds, many of which were painted by French animators. But Giraud also took responsibility for not keeping tabs on the artists bringing his ideas to life. After viewing a demonstration of Pannónia's work, Laloux remained in Budapest to coordinate day-to-day production—alongside animation director Tibor Hernádi—while Giraud returned to France to focus on his prolific career as an illustrator.

On his end, Laloux faced challenges in scoring *The Time Masters*. According to scholar Florian Guilloux, Laloux and producer Jacques Dercourt differed on the film's musical direction. Sound editor Dominique Boischot recommended Christian Zanési, an electronic-music pioneer. But Zanési was soon overwhelmed—despite the assistance of Pierre Tardy—by the prospect of tackling the musical numbers as well as the synthesizer-drenched themes and motifs that run through the film. Dercourt then brought on Jean-Pierre Bourtayre to compose the songs' melodies, while Jacques Lanzmann adapted the lyrics from those Wul himself had written for *The Orphan of Perdide*. (Wul later expressed frustration that his original words weren't used.)

However difficult the making of the film was for Laloux, and whatever issues Giraud may have had with the final product, *The Time Masters* hardly feels compromised: it strikingly manifests both Laloux's and Giraud's signature creatures and worlds—from the faceless, sexless angels that form a nefarious hive mind to the epic landscapes that evoke Moebius's lifelong obsession with the mythic American West. Though Giraud felt that *The Time Masters* could have been stronger, he was proud of his work on the film, and a hardcover compilation of his storyboards was printed in an edition of 999 copies after its French theatrical release on March 24, 1982.





By all accounts, *The Time Masters* was successful at the French box office but less so in several countries, including the United States, where it debuted over the next two years. (One of the film’s production companies, the BBC, broadcast an English-language dub in 1987 and 1991. In 2008, the BBC lost the rights to this version, which has never been given an official release.) It’s possible that another Möbius-adjacent title—a 1981 animated adaptation of the comic series *Heavy Metal*, which features explicit content and a panoply of star voice actors—helped to upstage *The Time Masters*. But the film’s reputation has continued to grow with critics and audiences, who have praised its synthesis of child-friendly comedy with more mature perspectives on aging, loss, and self-sacrifice.

## RENÉ LALOUX BIOGRAPHY

René Laloux was born in Paris on July 13, 1929. After attending college for fine art, he worked in advertising before shifting to psychiatry and eventually becoming the manager of the Cour-Cheverny clinic. It was at this clinic that he started an animation studio as a means of occupational therapy. In 1960, Laloux directed a short, *The Monkey’s Teeth* (*Les dents du singe*), scripted by his patients and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, alongside the studio of famed French animator Paul Grimault.

Two collaborations with writer and illustrator Roland Topor followed: the shorts *Les temps morts* (*Dead Times*, 1965) and *Les escargots* (*The Snails*, 1966). Begun in the early sixties, his feature-film debut, *Fantastic Planet*, took several years to complete, with Laloux directing a script adapted by himself and Topor from a science-fiction novel by Stefan Wul. The result was a surreal cult classic that found an audience among the last wave of “flower children.” It won a special prize at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival and remains a landmark of underground animation.

For his sophomore feature, Laloux teamed up with legendary comic-book artist Jean Giraud, also known as Moebius. Based on Giraud’s adaptation of another Wul novel, *The Time Masters* (1982) once again explores the outer limits of psychedelic sci-fi with visual and narrative ingenuity. Laloux then shifted gears, adapting a novel by Jean-Pierre Andrevon and enlisting the mononymous Caza to design the animation of what would be Laloux’s third and final feature, *Gandahar* (1987). The film received positive notices in France but was reedited by Miramax (using a new script by Isaac Asimov) for the derided English-language release *Light Years*. In October 2023, a fan collective called the *Gandahar* Restoration Project briefly uploaded a faithful English dub of the original, (mostly) unaltered film on YouTube.

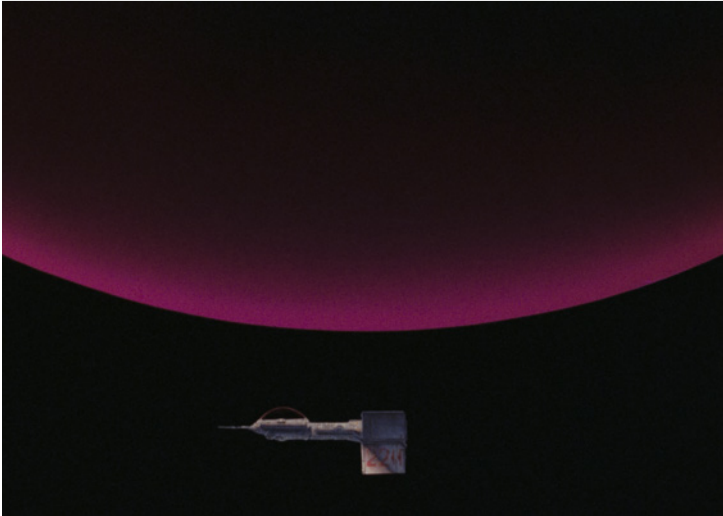
Though Laloux directed several other shorts throughout his career, he was unable to complete any other features before his death, from a heart attack, on March 14, 2004. His last great work was a book on animation, *Ces dessins qui bougent, 1892–1992: Cent ans de cinéma d’animation* (*Drawings That Move: A Century of Animation*, 1996), which contrasts the distinct styles and objectives of U.S. and European animation.

## CAST

Jaffar .....	Jean Valmont
Silbad .....	Michel Elias
Piel .....	Frédéric Legros
Matton .....	Yves-Marie Maurin
Belle .....	Monique Thierry
Claude .....	Sady Rebbot
Jad .....	Patrick Baujin
Yula .....	Pierre Tournneur
Xul .....	Alain Cuny
General .....	Yves Brainville
Igor .....	Michel Barbey
Lowry .....	Jim Bauman
Pixa .....	Michel Paulin
Robot .....	François Chaumette
Soldier .....	Henry Djanik
Englishman .....	Nick Storey
Pirate .....	Gabriel Cattand
Iroquois .....	Georges Atlas

## CREDITS

Directed by .....	René Laloux
Written by .....	René Laloux
	Jean Giraud (Moebius)
Dialogue .....	Jean-Patrick Manchette
Based on a novel by .....	Stefan Wul
Storyboards .....	Jean Giraud (Moebius)
Produced by .....	Jacques Dercourt
	Roland Gritti
Executive producers .....	Michel Gillet
	Miklós Salusinszky
Animation director .....	Tibor Hernádi
Music by .....	Christian Zanési
	Pierre Tardy
	Jean-Pierre Bourtayre
	Jacques Lanzmann
Cinematography by .....	Joltán Bacsó
	András Klausz
	Mihály Kovács
	Árpád Lossonczy
Editor .....	Dominique Boisshot



# JEAN GIRAUD (A.K.A. MŒBIUS) BIOGRAPHY

The artist known as Moebius was born Jean Henri Gaston Giraud on May 8, 1938, in Nogent-sur-Marne, near Paris. When Giraud was three years old, his parents divorced and left him largely in the care of his grandparents, who lived in Fontenay-sous-Bois, another suburb. Growing up in the aftermath of the German occupation of France during World War II, Giraud sought refuge in the Hollywood westerns screened at a local theater.

These genre films, as well as Belgian comics like *Spirou & Fantasio* and *Tintin*, inspired Giraud to start drawing around the age of nine. In 1954, when he was sixteen, he enrolled at the École supérieure des arts appliqués Duperré, where he obtained technical artistic training. However, the overly pragmatic assignments and conventional instructors frustrated his creative impulses, and Giraud dropped out of school two years later. During this time, he published his first illustrations in *Fiction* magazine; drew a two-page comic short, *Frank et Jérémie*, for the western magazine *Far West*; and illustrated other western comics like *Le roi des bisons* (*King of the Buffalo*) and *Un géant chez les Hurons* (*A Giant Among the Hurons*).

Upon leaving school, Giraud visited his remarried mother in Mexico, where he was at last able to view the vast, treacherous landscapes that, until then, had only stirred him from the silver screen—an experience that left a profound impression on him. After returning to France, the young artist was hired by Catholic publisher Fleurus Presse and commissioned to illustrate editorials for magazines such as *Fripounet* et *Marisette*, *Cœurs vaillants*, and *Âmes vaillantes*. However, in 1959 he received his draft notice. Giraud was able to avoid combat duty while stationed in Algeria, at the time convulsed by anticolonial revolution, by illustrating the army magazine *5/5 Forces françaises*.

In 1961, after this stint in the military, Giraud apprenticed under his idol, Joseph Gillain, better known as Jijé, the beloved Belgian illustrator of *Spirou*. In this capacity, Giraud provided art for the short-lived magazine *Bonux-Boy* and inking for the western series *Jerry Spring*. Jijé also encouraged Giraud to help illustrate Hachette's multivolume book series *L'histoire des civilisations*,

which allowed Giraud to experiment with oil painting. It was at Hachette that Giraud met his future first wife (and colorist), Claudine Conin. In 1963, after working on the first few volumes of the series, Giraud left this job to embark on *Fort Navajo* with writer Jean-Michel Charlier for *Pilote* magazine. This comic introduced the world to Lieutenant Blueberry, a dark antihero who would become one of Giraud's most iconic creations.

Giraud established another iconic creation around this time: his pen name Moebius. It was largely to explore science-fiction projects under this alias that he left *Pilote* in 1974. His collaboration with Chilean French filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky on a screen adaptation of Frank Herbert's landmark sci-fi novel *Dune* ultimately fell through, but Jodorowsky's interest in psychedelic drug use and shamanistic religious practices influenced Giraud, whose illustrating style and preoccupations became increasingly hallucinatory. Giraud ended up applying his Moebius signature to *Métal hurlant*, an influential comics anthology that he cofounded with artist Philippe Druillet, writer Jean-Pierre Dionnet, and financial director Bernard Farkas.

In 1979, Giraud resumed work on the *Blueberry* series, but not long afterward, Giraud and Charlier fought and ultimately split with *Pilote* publisher Les Éditions Dargaud over their earnings. The endlessly imaginative comics and illustrations that followed are almost too copious to neatly catalog, but some highlights include: *Arzach* (1975), *The Airtight Garage* (1976–79), *The Incal* (with Jodorowsky, 1981–88), *The World of Edena* (1983–2001), *The Silver Surfer* (1988). Giraud's work has been reprinted and anthologized by Marvel Comics (under its Epic imprint) as well as various other publishers and presses. He also contributed concepts, designs, and other ideas to films such as *Alien* (1979), *Tron*, *The Time Masters* (both 1982), *The Abyss* (1989), and *The Fifth Element* (1997), along with several video games.

Giraud died of cancer in Montrouge on March 10, 2012. He is considered one of the most innovative and influential comics illustrators in the history of the medium.

