

Kin-Dza-Dza!

GEORGIY DANELIYA

1986



To try to contain Georgiy Daneliya's *Kin-dza-dza!* is to do it an injustice. A highly sophisticated and complex film, it is a caustic social narrative with advanced semantic humour; surprisingly, it remains an absolute joy to watch and belongs to the high echelons of science fiction, in the company of Kurt Vonnegut and Douglas Adams. This dieselpunk foray into a seemingly apocalyptic wasteland departs from the action packed norms of the genre. Instead the plot is driven by nonsensical conversations between the earthlings and the aliens. These take place in cramped machine interiors, or the wide open space of the endless desert; as a result, *Kin-dza-dza!* almost devolves into a surreal theatre of the absurd. The performances from the cast and the witty dialogue are what truly propel the plot, in a lexical breakdown that would make Samuel Beckett proud.

Uncle Vova, a stoic and sarcastic construction worker, and 'the fiddler', a young Georgian student, find themselves on the planet Pluke after a chance meeting with an alien on a crowded Moscow street. Following a mishap with a transportation device, they find themselves in the apocalyptic, endless desert. Uncle Vova, steadfastly refuses to believe they have left earth and situates them in the Karakum, one of the closest deserts to Moscow, arguing there is no cause for concern. Here begins a series of posturing that pertains to logic, but is in essence totally illogical. The Karakum desert does not explain their mysterious teleportation at all.

These inconsistencies in thought arise all the time: between the earthlings themselves, and as incredulity between the earthlings and other species. Uncle Vova is shocked at the elaborate coloured trouser system and respect rituals that underpin the alien society of Pluke. Uef, a Chatlanian and a member of the designated superior society of the planet, asks how they discern social differences on earth, Uncle Vova says, 'By looking.' Uef is appalled and dismisses them as barbarians. The young Georgian violin student, is shocked at the blatantly racist social mechanisms. Patsaks, as visitors to the planet, despite generations of inhabitation, are required to wear bells on their noses and address Chatalanians with a series of squats and KU noises.

It should be noted that Georgiy Daneliya is a Georgian director, and was releasing films into a Russified Soviet milieu. This combined with a Georgian lead character are a subtle indicator of a critique aimed toward the society that bore this film. The endless desert landscape of Pluke is explained, fuel was made from water and the inhabitants drained the whole planet in the pursuit of capitalist excess.

Yet, whilst the film on the surface appears a critique of capitalism and its excesses, there are evident similarities between the communist society and the mad Plukhanian rituals. Even the untouchable high echelons of Chatalanian society resemble the nature of elitism within the Soviet Union. This is reflected in the language, a bizarre kind of new speak, *Ku* is an often used word which stands for most things. *Kyu* is a curse word which stands for everything bad. Deceptively close to each other, Pluke language parodies the arbitrary nature of designation and society's illogical designations. The film is in essence a dialectic on semantics. Using a new and invented language Georgiy Daneliya takes semiotics one step further and uses this to portray society's concerted and illogical nature. Pam Jahn for *Electric Sheep* aptly noted that the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari used 'minor literature' to describe work done from the point of view of a minority in the 'major' language of the coloniser. *Kin-dza-dza!* transposes elements of minor literature to cinema. The script reflects the frustrations of having a language imposed from above, most of it sounding like an unfamiliar, monotonous noise.'

During the mad journey, busking across the cosmos to find home, the fiddler and Uncle Vova are forced to consider the basis of rituals. With the eye of an outsider, it is apparent that they are based on pre-assumed hierarchal dynamics. The humans' behaviour through the cosmos disintegrates into performance, as they attempt to navigate the strange customs they have inadvertently become part of. In many ways, *Kin-dza-dza!* proves that truth is stranger than fiction, for when the humans eventually return to Earth at no point do we feel they have escaped the surreal.