



# EXHIBITION HALL

# January - Exhibition Hall - 2012

OK, this is the return. I know, I know, I've said that before, but I really mean it this time! Exhibition Hall is coming back to a more regular schedule, I promise. One of the reasons I am more driven to do Exhibition Hall again is that James and I won ourselves a Hugo for The Drink Tank in 2011, Journey Planet has been going well, and now in 2012, it's time to bring Exhibition Hall back to more regularity.

With a few changes.

One thing is that each issue will be rather shorter, and will tend to be on a single topic. In this case, it'll be a look at one of the better films of 2011: Hugo. It's a Steampunk film, and one of the few I've ever seen that isn't also a science fiction or fantasy film. That takes a little doing, but Hugo proves it's all possible. This issue, I'll be looking at the film and some of the works of the legendary filmmaker Georges Melies.

Also, the movie Hugo with its focus on an automaton and the works of the first great trick filmmaker made me refocus on ExHall, and I am going through it. Hugo is one of the most impressive films I've seen in ages, and seeing a movie can force me into action with great alacrity. Movies have that affect on me, which is a part of why Hugo was so great. I'll have two articles, one about how Hugo touched me, and one Georges Melies films and the ones that I really enjoyed and effected the future of film.



Trust me, it will make sense.

Steampunk in 2012 looks solid, but 2011 looked just as solid. Since our last issue, several significant Steampunk-y things have happened. The release of a new George Mann novel, new stuff from Cherie Priest and Gail Carriger and several new anthologies have happened since April. SO much good stuff. And there've been several Steampunk conventions and gatherings. There's even been a reference to Steampunk on The Simpsons! Nothing says you've made it as much as that!

We've got new books from the likes of Gail Carriger to look forward to, and hopefully Boilerplate will get the final get-go to make that movie happen. Cherie Priest's Boneshaker looks like it's got serious intentions behind it to get it to the screen. it could not happen to

a nicer person, as Cherie is one of the nicest people in Steampunk today!

Sadly, we lost one of the best (and first!) zines in Steampunk, and Dieselpunk, in The Gatehouse Gazette. Folding up shop it is, which kinda sucks. At least we're getting a new issue of Steampunk Magazine in February!

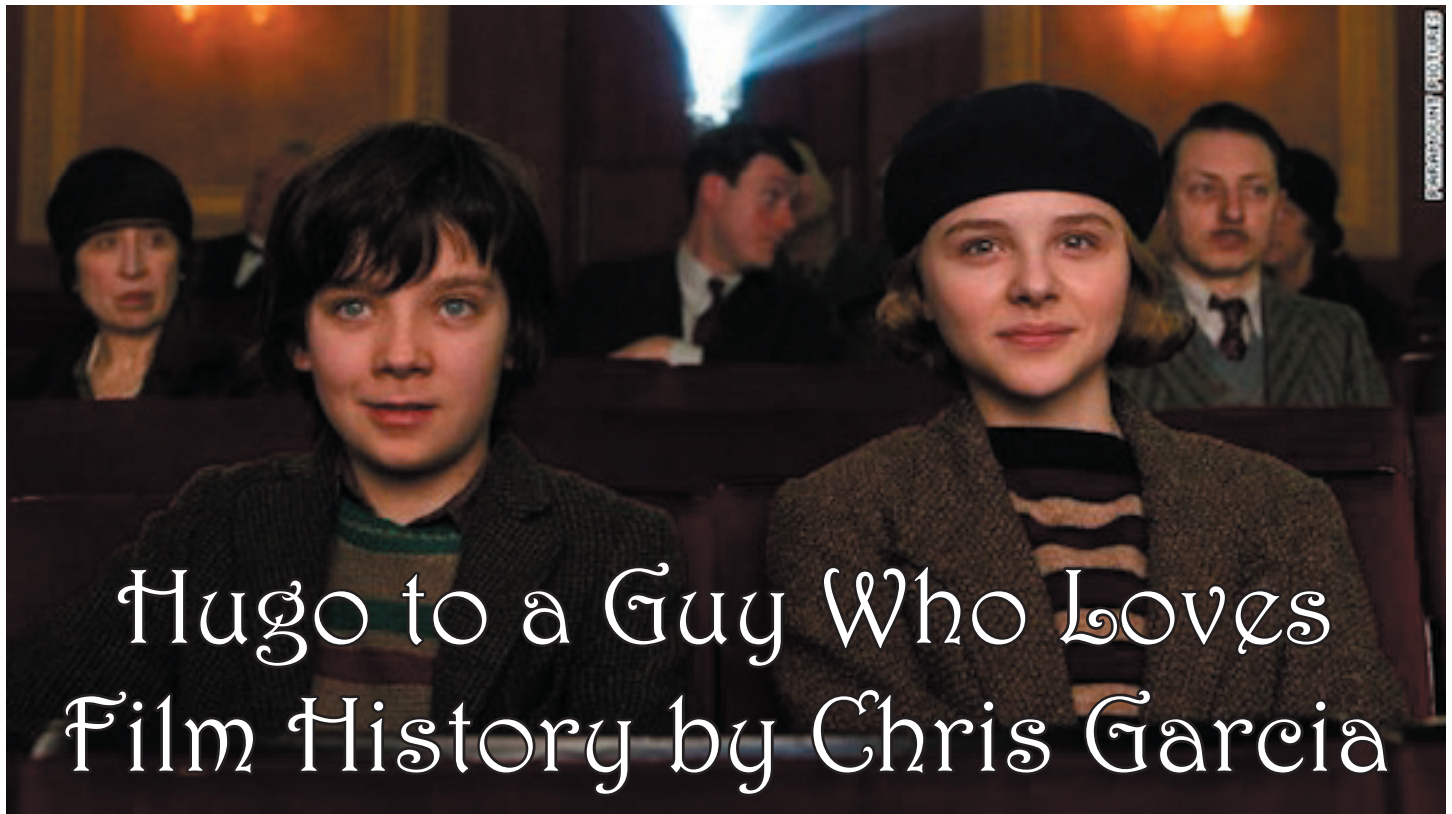
So, this issue is going to talk about Hugo, in large part, and Georges Melies, and fun and frolic!

We'd love to have stuff from y'all for future issues! Art, articles, fiction, whatever!

Away we go!

Comments, Questions or Content for Exhibition Hall?

Send it to [journeyplanet@gmail.com](mailto:journeyplanet@gmail.com)



# Hugo to a Guy Who Loves Film History by Chris Garcia

I had no idea going in. I had never read *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, so I had no idea what the movie was about saving for the images I'd seen in the previews. It was Martin Scorsese, a director that's had a hit-or-miss record with me. I loved films like *Casino*, and *The Gangs of New York* was really good if a bit over-violent, even for me. I knew that this was a film that rode the line between your standard family fare and a semi-dieselpunk world. It looked gorgeous, even in the small snippets I'd seen, but it was also 3D, which is not a thing that I usually enjoy. It was Thanksgiving in California's Central Valley, and as is our Thanksgiving tradition, we headed into the AMCs, paid our fourteen dollars, got our 3D glasses, settled in for the seeming eternity of preshow advertainment, and waited for the movie. When it finally arrived, I was amazed.

This is the movie that was made for me.

There will be spoilers, but I say you keep reading because it's not the story that you need to experience – it's the emotions.

Martin Scorsce is not my favorite director. There are films of his that I admire, like *Casino*, and some that I am not a fan of, like *Gangs of New York*. In my eyes, his best work

was as the editor of the film *Woodstock*. I do enjoy hearing Marty talk about film, as it is obvious that he truly loves it, that he believes in the power of film. Maybe it was that concept that really had me questioning.

Well, that and I read what must have been an early-ish version of the first 25 or so pages of the script. It was awful.

The film itself opens with a beautiful segment showing the details of the interior of the station clocks where Hugo Cabret, our young protagonist, lives. It's a gorgeous scene, though I must admit that in 3D, the colours were not what they could have been. I'm kinda betting that it'd look better in a flat mode because the sets, the costumes, the gears, everything is so rich with texture and contrasts that I'm betting it'd look more awesome in a format with better saturation.

As the film goes on, there are clues I should have understood. An older gentleman, played with amazing life by the great Sir Ben Kingsley, runs a toy shop in a train station. He's a grumpy old man, and when Hugo is caught stealing, he not only forces Hugo to turn over the items that he's stolen, but also a notebook which his father started after discovering an

automaton in the museum he worked at, and where he died after a fire destroyed it.

It also helped that I recognized the Museum as the Cast Court in the Victoria & Albert Museum in Kensington, London.

OK, so far we've got an Automaton, a kid whose Dad worked at a Museum, a train station and Borat playing a slightly crippled Station Inspector. It's as if they pulled pages from my mind and put them on the screen!

The real fun starts after Hugo discovers, with the help of the Toy Shop Owner's granddaughter, that the Automaton is programmed to draw an image of the Moon getting shot in the eye. The image, perhaps the most famous image in the history of cinema, is the most famous from the George Melies film *La Voyage Dans La Lune, A Trip To The Moon*. While not the first Science Fiction Film, it is arguably the most significant and the for the time, an Epic, more than five minutes long and telling a story about a group of scientists that blast off to the moon. It is one of my favorite films, a film that tells us the very basic form of the genre, that deals with the wonder that is film at it's most basic.

Melies made hundreds of films, most of them a minute or so long, some of them as long as fifteen minutes, but mostly short. In the early history of film, you could get away with a film that was nothing more than a few special effects. Typically, you'd pay to watch a series of films, much like a shorts programme

at a modern film festival. Melies had started his career as a magician, which gave him the knowledge needed when it came to fooling the audience. He knew how to play the Razzle-Dazzle.

Audiences grew out of his kind of films by start of World War One, which pretty much left Melies without an audience, and though he still made a few films, he was more or less forgotten. That led to him getting out of the business and starting a toy store in a train station.

I knew all of this. I had read everything there is to read about Melies without having to learn French, and have actually seen almost all of his films, well, the ones that are surviving, about a hundred of them. I can't believe I hadn't made the connection of the guy with the awesome mustache in the film to the Georges Melies that I have worshipped.

After Hugo and his friend discover Papa Georges is George Melies, they go about learning what they can, which takes them to a Film Library where they meet a film historian who is the last person interested in Melies.

OK, this part is a bit of a stretch. Melies' work was so widely spread, copied and let's face it, flat-out stolen. There were thousands of copies of *La Voyage Dans La Lune* in France and even more elsewhere in the world, including hundreds of prints in the US. What's funny is that most of these seem to have come from incomplete prints as there's at least one scene missing from the most complete copy that is currently available. In the 1930s, as a part of an average afternoon's film programme, you'd likely get one or two shorts, and it wouldn't have been rare to get an old Melies film mixed in with them. The images from *A Trip to the Moon* were also widely known, and often referenced in science fiction illustrations of the day. Melies was known to the wider Film Historian, and at least somewhat beloved, though many may have believed him dead in the Great War, he was



hardly forgotten.

Eventually, Hugo and co. lead the historian and the 'Only Surviving Melies Film' to the Melies' home and they watch A Trip to the Moon with Mrs. Melies, which is interesting because she was in the film and the actress they got to play her looks EXACTLY like one of the women who would have appeared in the films of the day. She was so perfect. This leads Hugo to bringing back the Automaton, which had been built by Melies, and this leads to the happy ending that we've all been hoping for for Hugo. At the end, there's a Melies retrospective and Hugo is given the credit for having caused it. It's a sweetheart of an ending.

The emotional center of the film is Hugo, I get it, but to me, there's nothing more important in this film than Melies. This wasn't the story of a boy who needs a new father to replace the one that got turned to ash; it's a story about what once was lost. This was the story of re-discovery, that someday someone will go digging, will find something that is new and fresh and just happens to be fifty years old. This happens a lot in Film History, one of

the guys who is best known for doing just that is a guy named Kevin Brownlow. He is, largely, responsible for the re-birth of interest in the Silent Era, specifically in the last thirty years. The growth of Film Archives over the last 30 years has helped.

The actual Melies ended up receiving a number of awards for his work during the later period of his life. I believe he received the Order of France, or whatever they call it. He also received a pension in the later years of his life. When he died, it was a very big deal and there were very many tributes to him

I was moved, seriously moved, because there's nothing that moves me more than a story of rediscovery. Scorsese obviously loves Silent film, and Melies in particular. There are some great moments of shots and references to films including my all-time favorite Silent: Safety Last starring Harold Lloyd. This love of film history works for the benefit of the audience.

Or at least this member of the audience.



# Georges Méliès' Greatest Hits

## by Christopher J Garcia

Georges Méliès was one of the first truly accomplished filmmakers. While innovators like The Lumiere Brothers and Edison's corps were still making relatively simple actualities, it was Méliès who was using in-camera tricks, and even animations, to create the first real fantasy and science fiction films. He made hundreds of films, a great many of which were lost by the 1930s. There are almost 100 of them currently known, and many of them exist on DVDs that are currently for sale. Two of the better of those DVDs, *The Magic of Méliès* and *Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema*, are both well worth seeking out. Many of the DVDs about early film feature Méliès' films because they've been public domain for quite a long time.

The following ten films are the ones that I have always enjoyed and loved, not necessarily those that have been the most important to the history of film.

### **Georges Méliès: The Conjuror**

Though it was made in 1899, just a couple of years before Méliès would make his most famous films and start cinema down a road of effects spectacles, this simple 1 minute film of a spectacular magician's act is really charming. It's a marvelous little film that shows Méliès' talent as a magician. He just doesn't stand there and let magic stuff happen all around him, he actually does it as a magician would. The flourishes, the obvious attempts at misdirections, the use of a scarf, but with Méliès understanding the power of the medium, how to do jumps and other in-camera tricks, it's pretty impressive.

You can see it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs5BBaNJ6mg>

### **The Haunted Castle – 1896**

One of the earliest of Méliès' films (and less than a year after the debut of the Lumière's camera and projector), you can see that it is not nearly as good as *The Conjuror*, and that Méliès was still finding his feet. The film opens with a bat flying in a static castle set, and that later turns into a dude. It's a neat effect, certainly for the audiences of the day who would have been used to seeing minute-long films of people walking out of factories, trains pulling into stations and panoramas of big cities,



it would have still been amazing. There are a bunch of tricks, like a stick striking the earth causing a man to appear and a very fake-looking cauldron. Perhaps that's what's most noticeable in comparing *The Haunted Castle* to other, later Melies films. He got much better at making props. He was still making theatre props at that point, and by 1900, he was creating the first film props. This is also considered by many to be the first horror film, which is a bit of a stretch as it wasn't designed to scare, but it almost certainly is the first vampire film!

You can see *The Haunted Castle* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPmKaz3Quzo&feature=related>

### **The Astronomer's Dream – 1898**

Not as well-known as some of his later films, *The Astronomer's Dream* is one of the most luscious of all Melies' films. The set here is magnificent. It's a gorgeous film, the set of which is an old-timey, fantastic astronomer's tower. There's a globe, a huge telescope, and Melies himself as an Astronomer, who happens to be dressed kinda like a wizard. He falls asleep and the Man in the Moon comes into the tower. It's a very familiar-looking Moon if you have seen *A Trip to the Moon*, but it's a scarier film. As an 1898 film, it was a little later than the more simple films, but at the time, it would have been accompanied by a narrator in the theatre explaining the story. With the advantage of 100 years of cinema steepedness, you can probably follow it without narration, but it is a little weird. Still, it's probably the one with the imagery I most recall save for one...

### **A Trip to the Moon - 1902**

The single most iconic image in the history of science fiction film is the image of the Rocket Ship stuck in the eye of the Moon. This one, the longest of his films up to that point, explores all of Melies tricks, includes some wonderful sets, and perhaps the finest of all the surviving tinting of his films. It's an amazingly charming film, and when you tie it to the hundred-plus years of cinema since then, it becomes something even more special. From the legendary films of Fritz Lang which bor-



rowed much of his imagery and recycled it for a new audience, to the brilliant music video for *Tonight, Tonight* by the Smashing Pumpkins, it's an iconic film and one that you should take a look at.

### **Le Homme de Tete - 1898**

This is a fun little magician film again. He pulls off his head and a new one replaces it. He spends time doing the real old-time proofs that there's no trickery going on, like crawling under the table to prove that there's no guy hiding under there. The understanding of film has changed, but the concepts of stage magic are still there. This film is an excellent example of stage tradition. Again, Melies seems like he's have an absolute blast playing with the new medium.



### **The Black Devil – 1905**

Not the best of the Melies films, but for sure joy, it's a good one. I believe it is Melies who plays the devil who breaks into a hotel room, he dances around, jumps on things and when the maids come around with the guy whose room it is, he disappears. There is very little in the way of film gimmicks for the first thirty seconds, but a couple of disappears and a few other bits happen by the end. But it all takes place in a single room where the devil tangles with the gentleman who is given the room. It's simple, and the Devil trashes the hotel room like Slash on a bender, but it is an amazingly joyous film.

### **Cleopatra – 1899**

Most of Melies films are lost, but one of the great finds of the last decade was the discovery of Cleopatra. While Melies had done historical reconstructions, this was a mummy film. Cleopatra's mummy comes to life and terrifies folks. It's a fun little movie, and the best part is that it is the start of the mummy movie. France in 1899 was deeply infused with Egyptian aesthetic, not to mention Chinois and Japonoise stuff, so

### **20,000 Leagues Under The Sea - 1907**

This was the first adaptation of Verne's classic novel, though it is short and not all that much of an adaptation, if you look at it. It's about ten minutes and it's pretty amaz-

ing what he managed in the film. Melies was always a trailblazer, and the earliest feature-length-ish version of 20,000 Leagues by Stuart Paton about ten years later used some of the imagery from the Melies version. This one, one of the best and longest of the early Melies films, is available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arhv1iorf9A>.



*You can find dozens of Melies films on the web, including at places like the Internet Archive (archive.org) and YouTube. Many of them are transfers from Paper Prints. As it was not possible to copyright a moving image, filmmakers would print out their movies on to paper and deposit them in places like the Library of Congress, where they were rediscovered in the 1950s. These produce films that are not of great quality, but many of those are the only existing versions of the films.*

*Next issue we'll be talkign about some of the classic silent films of the early portion of the last century, including trick films of the teens and early animations. These will include films from Edison, Potter, and Blackton.*