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REVIEW

Book Review: *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick

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One word: Masterpiece!

The Invention of Hugo Cabret is an incredible book, the like of which I have never seen before. It's a decadent visual treat as well as a gripping and wonderful story. It falls into its own category of part graphic novel, part novel, part cinema, part picture book with the occasional still of silent movies thrown into the mix.

The Invention of Hugo Cabret is the story of a young boy who lives in a train station in 1930s Paris. His father, a clockmaker, died in a museum fire under mysterious circumstances and Hugo went to live with his drunken uncle, who had a job setting all the giant clocks in the station. Clocks figure prominently in the story.

Months ago, Hugo's uncle went out drinking and never came back. Frightened that he would be discovered and taken to an orphanage, Hugo has continued his uncle's job, allowing the paychecks to pile up living by stealing food from the various vendors in the train station.

He also steals mechanical parts from a toymaker. Hugo found an automaton in the ashes of the museum fire that killed his father and is determined to bring it to life, thinking that somehow, someday, it will bring his father back since his father was quite obsessed with it before he died. Hugo gets caught stealing a toy mouse and becomes involved with the mysterious toymaker and his ward Isabel. The plot gets more and more intricate as it goes along and the mystery deepens until its marvelous ending. The great storytelling in this book doesn't just rely on the pictures or artwork, rather each — both text and art — blend together to tell you an amazing tale. Each complements the other while balancing the other out.

Every page takes you deeper into the mystery, tells more about the history of silent film, including that of one of its pioneers, Georges Melies and his 1902 masterpiece, *A Trip to the Moon*. Selznick gives quite a bit of history of both automata and Georges Melies and gets the reader wanting more. Luckily, he includes lists of places to find out more as an appendix to the book. The book is huge and may be a little daunting for children or adults when they first see the size of it – but push, shove, do whatever you have to do to get them to open that first page because then, you're hooked.

The Invention of Hugo Cabret reminds me of a comic or a flipbook in that it has quite long sections of black and white sequential art telling the story without text. The illustrations in that art are gorgeous. They're all done in these amazing pencil drawings that look like charcoal sketches and the detail is sublime.

The faces, especially the eyes, are mesmerizing in their depth, beauty and seem stunningly lifelike yet with the haunting quality of a dream. The silent movie stills along with archival photographs of the era contribute to the dreamlike, silent film feel of the book. I loved how pages mimicked the pan of a camera and how drawings are set on black background to get that feel of old photographs or stills. It's pure, wonderful genius!

For more information on *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, see its [website](#).

Word has it that has been optioned by Warner Brothers, and that Martin Scorsese has potentially signed on to direct the film.

Gina MarySol Ruiz has worked in the entertainment industry for the past 15 years including the completely online publication group specializing in the animation and visual effects industry worldwide, AWN.com.

Comments

