

HUGO

Directed by Martin Scorsese
(2011) Arrow Video 4K/Blu-ray combo

At first watch, the 2011 film *Hugo* may seem like the most unlikely entry in deservedly lauded director Martin Scorsese's entire filmography. After all, this is the same director who has brought some of the most acclaimed crime dramas to the silver screen: *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Goodfellas*, *Casino*, *Gangs of New York*, *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *The Irishman* are all vivid and intimate portraits of the soft crime-ridden underbelly of America's fragmented history

which the Flushing, New York native has deftly translated to the world of cinema. But if you look a little closer, there's a whole other side of the 80-year old director which marks him as one of the most versatile and tonally different auteurs to ever hit Hollywood. Films like *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, *After Hours*, *The Color of Money*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Kundun*, *The Aviator* and *Shutter Island* all showcase a creative mind that's not content to ride the laurels of some of his more celebrated Mafioso outings. It should go without saying by this point in time that Martin Scorsese is no film snob's patsy, relegated to any one specific genre of cinema. Perhaps the biggest clue for anyone that this is someone with extraordinary depth of range is the classic major motion picture *Hugo* which is nothing short of magical.

Structured like a fairytale come to vivid Technicolor life, Scorsese's adaptation of the 2007 novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* from wordsmith Brian Selznick didn't make much of a ripple upon its 2011 release, Scorsese's involvement erased what could have been obscurity for the book.

Set in and around a Parisian railroad station during the 1930s, *Hugo* follows the small yet epic journey of a young lad called Hugo Cabret (a brilliant and breakthrough performance from a young Asa Butterfield). Going the *Little Orphan Annie* route after the sudden passing of his inventor father (Jude Law in a blink-and-you'll-miss-him role), Hugo haunts and lives by himself within the Gare Montparnasse train station, tasked by his ne'er do well uncle with maintaining the impressive collection of clocks which decorate the structure. It's this fanciful setup right out of Dickens which sets the stage for the larger story at hand.

Forced into a life of small time theft in order to subsist, it's not long before we meet a circle of characters who will become instrumental in young Hugo's future: A seemingly Scrooge-like toy vendor (an always welcome Ben Kingsley) and his wife (a scene-stealing Helen McCrory), their goddaughter Isabelle (Chloë Grace Moretz, already showcasing superlative acting chops at a very young age), an overzealous Station Inspector (Sacha Baron Cohen, proving that he can do a lot more than just *Borat*), an unassuming and pretty flower girl (Emily Mortimer, practically glowing like uranium on screen) and a bookstore owner with a heart of gold (Christopher Lee in a performance so good viewers may wish Scorsese had met with the actor about thirty years earlier). Together, this motley crew circles the diminished and exhausting life of this street urchin whose one goal is to repair an automaton which he and his father were working on before the tragedy which claimed the elder Cabret.

A simple summary like the one above is all good and well, but it comes up short in describing adequately just what a pleasure and cinematic palette cleanser *Hugo* is. Scorsese has never been understated when it comes to his love and passion for the history of the movies, and the *Bringing Out the Dead* director lets his Nerd flag fly proudly all throughout this film, especially after it's revealed that the toy shop owner Georges turns out to be none other than high iconic silent movie maker Georges Méliès, years removed from his great visual triumphs and living in anonymity. It's after this revelation that *Hugo* really kicks into high gear, becoming nothing less than a love letter to the magic of early cinema.

The Arrow Video 4K UHD premiere of *Hugo* is worth celebrating on a number of fronts: The picture has never looked better with this new and painstaking transfer by the good folks at Arrow who have also included the Blu-ray 2D rendition of the film, partnered up with the Blu presentation of the 3D version.

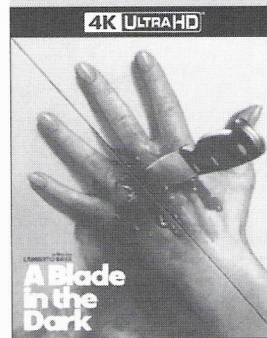
Also included in this special edition is an exhaustive commentary track, interviews with Brian Selznick, the writer of the novel which the film is based off of and a whole passel of others such as composer Howard Shore and an eye-opening chat with French cinema archivist and researcher Julien Dupuy who takes an in-depth look at the life and overall legacy of Georges Méliès. Rounding the features off are a series of archival featurettes which can be found on past DVD versions of *Hugo*, here handily transported over to the new disc.

Hugo brings to mind some of the very best in children's literature such as *Marianne Dreams*, *The Velveteen Rabbit* and mixes it with a fair dose of *Great Expectations*. Credit not only Scorsese for bringing those elements to the fore in the film, but also the movie's screenwriter and frequent Scorsese collaborator John Logan. Logan brings his own past work with Tim Burton to this particular party, weaving a spell which, once it has a hold on the viewer, is slow to loosen its mesmerizing grip, ultimately making *Hugo* worth multiple viewings

Ryan Vandersgriff

A BLADE IN THE DARK

Directed by Lamberto Bava
(1983) Vinegar Syndrome 4K/Blu-ray combo



Lamberto Bava earned his cinematic stripes as an assistant director on all of his father Mario's films, from 1965's *Planet of the Vampires* to 1977's *Shock (aka Beyond the Door II)*, where Lamberto was credited as co-screenwriter. His made his directorial debut in 1980 with *Macabre* (co-written by Pupi Avati), which established his unique directorial style and a visual sense distinct from his father's. He continued doing assistant director work, including Ruggero Deodato's notorious, unflinchingly brutal *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) and Dario Argento's revisit to the giallo genre he helped popularize, *Tenebrae* (1982). No doubt *Tenebrae* was a

direct inspiration for *A Blade in the Dark* in terms of style and plotting.

A Blade in the Dark was originally shot to air as a four part miniseries on Italian TV as four twenty-seven minute episodes, with each segment ending in the crescendo of a violently gruesome murder. The Italian TV censors said "nope, too violent" so the decision was made to re-edit the miniseries into a feature film and blow it up from 16mm to 35mm for theatrical release. The pacing feels slightly episodic but it still works as a suspenseful, gory riff on the giallo, with the requisite surprise reveal of the mystery killer that you may or may not see coming from a mile away.

A horror director (Fabiola Toledo) hires a composer (Andrea Occhipinti) to score her latest horror film and sends him to a secluded Tuscany villa to provide a spooky atmosphere as he writes. The film-within-a-film that he's scoring stars Giovanni Frezza, known to Lucio Fulci fans as "Bob", everyone's favorite whiny little towheaded brat from *House by the Cemetery*. Also showing up is Michele Soavi (*Fulci's City of the Living Dead aka The Gates of Hell*), years before he would direct his own genre classics (1989's *The Church* and 1994's *Dellamorte Dellamore aka Cemetery Man*). True to giallo form, gruesome murders begin occurring around the villa and it's up to our protagonist to unravel the mystery, which just might be connected to the film he's currently trying to score (the catchy score is by Guido and Maurizio De Angelis, aka "Oliver Onions", who jointly composed soundtracks for many of the Terence Hill/Bud Spencer team-ups).

Co-written by Elisa Briganti and frequent Argento collaborator Dardano Sacchetti, the script is tight and economical, with little wasted connective tissue between the kill scenes. The murder set pieces are, of course, the main focal points and are shot with skill and suspenseful pacing, leading to some satisfyingly gory scenes that it's hard to imagine could ever have played on television anywhere. Bava's career following this film was uneven, from the bona fide classics *Demons* (1985) and *Demons 2* (1986), both produced and co-written by Dario Argento; to the not-so-classics *Monster Shark* (1984) and (oof!) *Graveyard Disturbance* (1989).

Vinegar Syndrome's Blu-ray looks perfectly good, if a bit grainy due to the 35mm blowup. A hair shows up in the gate in a couple of shots, which I assume could not be remedied in the new transfer. Overall nothing to complain about; this is an excellent presentation and easily replaces the previous DVD release (which was nice for its time) as the release of record.

Two audio tracks are provided on the Blu-ray: the original Italian mono soundtrack with optional English subtitles and an English dubbed mono track with a choice of optional English SDH or Narrative subtitles. The Italian track is the preferred one, even though the film was recorded without sound and dubbed later, as was the custom in Italian cinema at the time. The English dub is awful and with the Italian track, at least the dialogue comes close to matching the actors' mouth movements.

Special features on the disc are ported over from previous video releases and are comprised of "Behind the Blade," a ten-minute archival interview (produced for the 2001 Anchor Bay DVD release) with director Lamberto Bava and co-writer Dardano Sacchetti that explains the origins of the project and the struggles they had during their collaboration;

"All the Colors of Giallo", a thorough 90 minute documentary (directed by Fererico Caddeo and produced for Severin Films in 2019) on the history and evolution of the giallo genre, with insights from Argento, Lamberto Bava, Dario Nicolodi, Barbara Bouchet and many others.

All in all, this is a great disc for any giallo fan or any fan of '80s Italian horror in general. Maybe not in a league with Argento's best (or even his second best really), but a serviceable enough entry that should satisfy most fans of the genre.

Vinegar Syndrome has also released *A Blade in the Dark* in 4K UHD in a gorgeous four-disc limited edition metal box + slipcover packaging with a plethora of brand new extras including a 40-page perfect bound book. Limited to 7000 copies and available only from their website (www.VinegarSyndrome.com).

Lee Peterson