

The Stolen Airship



*Two years of vacation in Karel Zeman's
most entertaining film*

Karel Zeman

The Stolen Airship



Czechoslovakia, 1966, 88 min.
Digitally restored 2022

Directed by Karel Zeman
Written by Karel Zeman and Radovan Krátký
(based on the novel Two Years Vacation
by Jules Verne)

Camera by Josef Novotný and Bohuslav Pikhart

Music by Jan Novák

Cast: Michal Pospíšil, Hanuš Bor, Jan Čížek,
Josef Stránil, Jan Malát, Jitka Zelenohorská,
Jana Sedlmajerová, Čestmír Řanda and more

In this artistically elaborate adaptation of Jules Verne's novel Two Years' Vacation, Karel Zeman took inspiration from Art Nouveau advertisements and newspaper collages. The five boys' suspenseful airship flight is intertwined with a humorous tale of espionage, the aim of which is to obtain the invention of non-flammable gas.

The rapidly escalating pace of the story sits well with the increasingly hectic world of the late 19th century. The charm of Zeman's style lies not only in his faithful depiction of a child's world but also in the poetics of his varied inventions. Airships, unruly vehicles, grotesque horse-legged conveyances, benevolent submarines - all seem to have lives of their own. Zeman uses the widescreen format for the first time here, which helps him to show his visually rich world even more perfectly, with many purely cinematic gags.

Steampunk, flying, agents, a mysterious island, an investigation, suspense, adventure, and two incompatible worlds - the strict world of adults and the unbridled world of children, full of imagination and adventure - all this lies at the heart of Karel Zeman's Stolen Airship.

Annotation

The thrilling story begins at the Prague Exhibition Grounds, where five boys seize the opportunity to embark on an adventure aboard a majestic airship.

The theft of the airship causes an uproar. The Prague prosecutor is outraged at the children's lawlessness. Quick-witted journalist Ardan embarks on a sensation-hunting mission. The inventor of the airship uses its disappearance to pull off a scam with non-flammable gas, and an unnamed military power sends an agent to uncover the formula for it.

Amid this global upheaval, the boys embark on an aerial journey around the world. However, the airship crashes on a remote island and the boys must deal with pirates and other pitfalls. With the help of Captain Nemo, however, as well as the brave Ardan, they overcome all the dangers and are rewarded with the honors they deserve.

The age-old battle between unbridled youth and the strict world of grown-ups ends victoriously for the children, who end the film with a game of train robbery.



„I was and still remain a great admirer of the works of Jules Verne. He was the writer of my youth, and I think he will still be the writer of my grandchildren.

Man has created a grandiose world of technology, of which dread and fear are often the results... Fortunately, events in the world and our way of life are not determined by technology alone.

With the vast sweep of his imagination, Jules Verne created a whole world of magical things imbued with a delightful naiveté, which just charms us.“

Karel Zeman





Awards

- Czechoslovak Film Award for one of the nine most successful films of 1966
- 2nd International Children's Film Festival in Tehran (1967)
– Special Award of the Iranian Institute
- 5th Addis Ababa IFF (1968) – 2nd Prize
- 2nd Rimini International Film Festival for Children and Youth (1968)
– 1st Prize of the Neptune Children's Jury
- Award of the Minister of Culture in the field of film production (1968)
- Czech and Slovak Film Showcase in Sorrento (1969) - Silver Siren
- Urania, The Muse of Prague Audiences Award (1969)



Restoration of The Stolen Airship

Digital restoration is a very demanding process. Inherently, it includes historical research, which defines the technological conditions and artistic intention under which the work was created and put into distribution.

The aim of the restoration work is to restore the image and sound of the film as it was at the time of its premiere.



The restoration is carried out by a team made up of specialists and experts (archivists, cameramen, colorists, restorers, film technologists, data processing specialists, and, last but not least, retouchers).

The interim results are consulted with the authors of the films. All interventions correspond to the current methodology of technologies in the field of digitization of audiovisual heritage, are in accordance with the ethical principles of the restoration of audiovisual works, and also with current copyright legislation.

Restoration of The Stolen Airship

Behind the project is the Karel Zeman Museum, whose main purpose is to spread the legacy and work of the screen magician Karel Zeman. Either in the form of a permanent exhibition on the Malá Strana in Prague, restoration of films and their distribution, or organizing exhibitions and accompanying events dedicated to Zeman's work and creation.



The digital restoration of this film was funded by a donation from Ms. Milada Kučerová and Mr. Eduard Kučera and was carried out by the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in collaboration with the Karel Zeman Museum, the Národní filmový archiv Prague and the Czech Film Fund in UPP and Soundsquare.

The sources for the digitization were the original image negative and the original sound negative. The film materials are preserved by the Czech National Film Archive.

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film
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Karel Zeman

One of the most significant Czech directors, screenwriters, and fine artists, Karel Zeman was born in 1910 and died in 1989. He made a number of short, medium-length, and feature-length films, the most renowned of which are *Journey to the Beginning of Time*, *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, and *The Fabulous Baron Munchausen*. Zeman received a number of prizes and awards at prestigious film festivals, making Czech cinematography famous throughout the world in the 20th century. He was admired in his time by personalities like Pablo Picasso, Charlie Chaplin, and Salvador Dal. His film work is still highly regarded, and the techniques he used are studied at film schools throughout the world. The aesthetics of Zeman's film creations have influenced a range of world-class filmmakers, such as the director, fine artist, and member of Monty Python Terry Gilliam.

A true successor to Georges Mlis and a wizard of the big screen, as he was often called, Karel Zeman was born in Ostromř near Nov Paka in northern Bohemia. A brilliant pioneer of special effects in film, he is still one of the few Czech directors to be universally recognized in the world of cinema.

Ever since his childhood he had adored puppets and performed with them in a puppet theatre. Despite his artistic talent, his parents insisted he study business at high school in Koln. At 17, responding to an advertisement in a newspaper, he went to Aix-en-Provence in the south of France, where he studied advertising design. While in France, he frequently visited the cinema and became especially interested in animated movies. He was to put this knowledge to good use in his own first attempt at animation – an advertisement for soap.

He traveled widely in his youth, hiking in Morocco, Egypt, Yugoslavia, and Greece.

After his military service he returned to work in advertising, and, in 1939, he was about to make an extended trip to Casablanca in Morocco, as a representative of the Bata shoe company, but failed to get the necessary papers from the then Protectorate authorities in time and in the end he had to stay put.

He then began working as head of the advertising section of a department store in Brno. In 1943, the film director Elmar Klos was sent to make a report about a window-dressing competition that Zeman had recently won. Klos was so taken by Zeman's work that he immediately offered him a job at the Bata Film Studios, in the Kudlov suburb of Zln. Thus began the professional career of this later world-famous film director and production designer.



Zeman often had to struggle against difficult conditions in the technically ill-equipped Kudlov Studios. Many of the workers with whom he started had no particular experience of filming. They, like Zeman himself, had to learn everything on the job. Gradually a coordinated creative team emerged.

Journey to the Beginning of Time released in 1955 became Zeman's breakthrough film, his first to combine live-action, animation, and puppetry. Four years later, Invention for Destruction saw him shoot to worldwide success. The film was immediately sold to 72 countries and became the most successful Czech film of all time.

Zeman continued to develop his highly successful use of special effects in The Fabulous Baron Munchausen and the two Jules Verne adaptations that followed. In the 1970s, partly motivated by his love for children and the desire to create films, especially for them – but also partly because of the difficulty of shooting live-action movies – Zeman returned to making strictly animated films.

In the late 70s, Zeman was threatened with the loss of his sight, but he overcame the disease and continued working. In the final stages of his life, he suffered from heart problems.

Karel Zeman died in Zlín on April 5, 1989.

Karel Zeman



Filmography

- 1945 Vánoční sen – The Christmas Dream
- 1946 Pan Prokoup: Podkova pro štěstí – Mr. Prokoup: A Horseshoe for Luck
- 1946 Křeček – The Hamster
- 1947 Zatopená zahrádka – The Deluge of the Animals
- 1947 Pan Prokoup v pokušení / Mr. Prokoup in Temptation
- 1947 Pan Prokoup ouřaduje – Mr. Prokoup, The Office Clerk
- 1947 Pan Prokoup na brigádě – Mr. Prokoup, The Volunteer
- 1948 Pan Prokoup filmuje – Mr. Prokoup, The Filmmaker
- 1949 Pan Prokoup vynálezcem – Mr. Prokoup, The Inventor
- 1949 Inspirace – Inspiration
- 1950 Král Lávro – King Lavra
- 1952 Poklad Ptáčího ostrova – The Treasure of Bird Island
- 1955 Pan Prokoup, přítel zvířátek – Mr. Prokoup, The Animal Lover
- 1955 Cesta do pravěku – Journey to the Beginning of Time
- 1957 Pan Prokoup detektivem – Mr. Prokoup, The Detective
- 1958 Černý dým – The Black Diamond
- 1958 Vynález zkázy – The Fabulous World of Jules Verne
- 1959 Pan Prokoup akrobatem – Mr. Prokoup, The Acrobat
- 1960 Laterna magika II – The Magic Lantern II
- 1961 Baron Prášil – The Fabulous Baron Munchausen
- 1962 Kouzelný svět Karla Zemana – The Magical World of Karel Zeman
- 1964 Bláznova kronika / A Jester's Tale
- 1964 Bez pasu a bez víza z Kudlova do San Franciska
– From Kudlov to San Francisco with no Passport and no Visa
- 1966 Ukradená vzducholod' – The Stolen Airship
- 1970 Na kometě – On the Comet
- 1974 Pohádky tisíce a jedné noci – The Adventures of Sinbad the Sailor
- 1977 Čarodějův učeň – Krabat / Krabat - The Sorcerer's Apprentice
- 1980 Pohádka o Honzíkovi a Mařence – The Tale of John and Mary

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