

Keep Watching the Skies! American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties (2 Volumes in 1) by Bill Warren



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Relive and thrill to the science fiction movies of the '50s (through 1962), when jujubes and popcorn with extra butter went arm and arm with mad women (*Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*), weird teenagers (*I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*, *Teenage Zombies*), ill-fated matches (*I Married a Monster from Outer Space*), victims of scientific experiments (*The Fly*), and all those things that kept dropping in from outer space (*The Blob*, *The Brain Eaters*). As Warren meticulously and unfailingly points out, special effects were infantile ("They fall into a huge spider web which strongly resembles a cargo net," *Earth vs. The Spider*), budgets incredibly small ("As Jack Moffitt noted, 'the giant spaceman must be a fugitive from medieval France since, on his chest, he wears a shield bearing the fleur-de-lis. On his back, is an Assyrian bull, indicating he may have had his cleaning, pressing and mending done in Babylon'," *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*). From *The Astounding She-Monster*, another small budget reminder: "In the first day of filming, the She-Monster bent over to kill one of the characters and ripped (her) suit in the back ... so in all subsequent scenes, the She-Monster makes exits and entrances facing the camera. Of course, this means she is walking *backward* much of the time, but aliens are weird." The book is filled with witty, fanatically in-depth critiques, with insider anecdotes. In addition to detailed plot synopses and production data, Warren cites good and bad reviews from the period, then adds his own analysis of how the film stands up after two or three decades. Credits add to and correct other published sources. Fantastic photographs, drawings, appendices and index are included.



Reviews of the **Keep Watching the Skies! American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties (2 Volumes in 1)** by Bill Warren

Vikus

I was deeply disappointed with this book. Since when have films like "The Crimson Pirate" been SF movies? Many films included, such as "The Quatermass Experiment" are English, not American. "Devil Girl from Mars" is as English as you can get. "Gorgo" is British, a monster movie and made in the 1960s. Frankenstein films are NOT SF in the true sense of the word - I could go on and on. The author unfairly rubbishes genre favorites like John Agar as though he has a grudge against them, and he's down on so many treasured movies that you get the impression he's not a fan of the genre at all. Also, not everybody wants whole paragraphs on the mechanics of film production, it takes away the mystique and comes across as being clever just for the sake of it. There are many better, easier to digest and more enlightened reads on the subject than this overblown thesis. A hefty \$80 not well spent, I'm afraid.

Feri

Having scanned about half of the thus far 42 reviews, I don't want to duplicate the basics/bona fides outlined in most of these. Yes the book is quite comprehensive, omitting only the serials--which I also enjoyed immensely. It doesn't give you cookie-cutter set piece type reviews--which one reviewer found annoying. True, there is no consistency in the manner of presentation, but I found this to be a plus. It's like the author, who clearly loves these films, sat down with you and chatted, assuming that, like him, you are a big fan. Now if you want a scholarly tome about the films, then you might have to look elsewhere, but the author does provide you with a heck of a lot of information and insight on these movies, even if they are his informed opinions

I just received an academic dissertation on sci-fi film, a very erudite work. The jargon and empty catchphrases make my eyes glaze over. There are abstractions cross-referenced to other ill-defined abstractions. The prof obviously couldn't have enjoyed viewing the films, busy as he was with his footnotes. If you want to know about "paradigms" and "genre" and "cultural diffusion" etc. then pick up one of those deadly dull professorial treatises. However, if you want to be entertained as well as informed, then this is the book for you. The operative word is "knowledgeable", which Mr. Warren certainly is, and quite enthusiastic as well.

I am 75 and grew up watching these films---no devouring them---as soon as they hit my local cinema in Southern New Jersey. I love to talk about my first impressions as well as why I would, or would not, see a particular film again. This is just the kind of discursive treatment this encyclopedic (in breadth) double-volume provides.

Sure there's a good dose of schlocky clunkers, with poorly designed sets--cardboard cutouts---and rubber-mold aliens, but these were not necessarily viewed as such when they were first released.

This was years before computer-generated-imagery and other modern cinematic techniques that one has seen in, say Avatar, the Matrix series, etc. Plus, it's well to recall that much of the early sci fi movies were aimed at adolescents, as their parents were more interested in the Cary Grant, Joan Crawford mainstream dramas being screened at that time. In fact some of the selections are only marginally sci-fi, having a superficial technical or quasi-scientific twist, which is hardly central to the theme. Nonetheless, these reviews are important, since some "B" film producers threw in the pseudo-science to cash in on the sci-fi vogue.

All-in-all a wonderful reference that will keep me busy for months to come, reliving those Saturday afternoons over a half a century ago, when one could vicariously travel to the farthest reaches of our galaxy and beyond, long before the Apollo moon landing changed our perspective on space exploration.

Wतिकालते

I happened upon this book through an ad in Filmfax magazine. Upon reading the review in Filmfax, I ordered the book right away. As usual Amazon shipped the book lightning fast and I recieved it the next day. This book's content is amazing, no stone left unturned in some of the summaries I've read so far. I recommend the book highly for it's content, it's like a sci-fi/horror encyclopedia.

Several complaints: 1) Very overpriced, period. 2) Not enough pictures, especially in the classic movie summaries. For example, I don't think they had any pics in The Blob's synopsis. 3) The pages while slick and glossy are extremely thin, they will bend and crinkle with light use. For the price, they should have kept it in two volumes with a hard slipcase to keep them in. I love the way the Dilbert 2.0 20th Anniversary book was done, and it was much more affordable. 4) The posters in the color sections were displayed kinda oddly to me. The poster for movies like The Blob etc. are presented as small, while posters for crap like Queen of Space is full page!!!

PS The dust cover art is awesome!! Too bad they didn't use a hardcover as the dust cover is pretty flimsy and can rip pretty easy.

Still for the material only, HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

RUL

This is not a conventional cataloging of movies; it is an intensely personal view of a class of movies, and the fascinating stories of their conception and production. One reviewer found this approach confusing and boring; I found it highly entertaining and insightful.

One must simply respect the years of research involved in assembling this nearly 1,000-page work, given the difficulty of locating original sources of material many years after the fact. The terms "prodigious", "phenomenal" and "extraordinary" come to mind, and that doesn't begin to exhaust the laudatory adjectives I could apply.

Put simply, I found this book fascinating and fun to read. The author does an astounding job of narration, assembling a widely diverse group of facts and weaving them into a tapestry which heavily reflects his own personal preferences and views. Since I agree with most of the latter, this book is a compelling read for me. I didn't read it from front to back, but selected the sections on the movies I remember most fondly and read them first. I am now working my way through the sections which discuss movies I am less familiar with, and find them equally entertaining. This is a book to be read over months and years, not in a few sittings.

There are plenty of photos in the book (including a central color section of movie posters), but as one critic pointed out, it would have been nice to have a few more. But this book is already so big and heavy it is hard enough to hold while reading it. If any more material were added, it would have to

be split into two volumes, to avoid an increase in hernias in the general population.

Thank you, Bill Warren, for a true labor of love.

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