

1939: The Making of Six Great Films from Hollywood's Greatest Year

Charles F. Adams

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Adams's thoroughness and energy make this book appealing to both movie lovers and those fascinated by the inner workings of filmmaking.

1939, by Charles F. Adams, gives a behind-the-scenes look at the making of six films that have been captivating audiences for the last seventy-five years.

1939 was one of the most hit-producing, history-making years in the history of movies and included work by a whole range of stars who are still household names: Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, and Judy Garland. The book focuses on one movie at a time: *Gone with the Wind*, *Stagecoach*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. Each section is organized in chronological order and tells about the origin of the movie's narrative and its path to the big screen. The chapters close with at-a-glance pages that list the basic facts of the movie, such as studio, cost of production, cast list, and awards. The book's six-fold focus allows each movie to be explored to an appropriate depth—none likely warrants a whole book of its own, but each is rich enough for more than an article or a brief chapter. Readers familiar with the films will find new insights and connections, and readers less familiar will have their interest piqued.

Adams has been a movie lover since childhood, and the book fuels this childlike passion, backed by the author's insight and research. It includes little-known sensational stories, almost like a Hollywood gossip magazine—from spats between Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable to the catastrophic opening night of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, to how a last-minute switch made Ray Bolger a star and landed Buddy Ebsen in the hospital—but the book is engaging and well researched and shows the author's attention to factual accuracy and impartial narration. Adams is both historian and fanatic, giving the book both thoroughness and energy.

Some of the most interesting passages tell how and why critics and fans of the era objected to these now-beloved films: Washington journalists found the portrayal of their profession offensive in *Mr. Smith*, and reviewers criticized the scriptwriter's treatment of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

The coda includes brief notes on a dozen other historic films from 1939. Plentiful photos, including those of actors and movie posters, bolster the text and reproduce well on the page despite their age. Though the cover image seems too bright and has the feel of an animated film rather than the classic, even antique, feel of films of the golden age of Hollywood, this book will whet the appetite of movie connoisseurs.

MELISSA WUSKE (Spring 2014)

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