

MGM: Saving The Best for Last: Dore Schary and the Death of MGM

Mr Charles Ziarko

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A tome for the trivia buff, this is a witty look at MGM movies and an assistant director's uncensored take on the stars.

Forget the glamour and the star power of the golden age of Hollywood and go way behind the scenes with this scrapbook of facts, observations, and opinions compiled by career assistant director Charles Ziarko. Early in his career, as an apprentice in the 1960s, Ziarko came across a ledger detailing budget and technical information for decades of MGM movies. This, and his obvious love for cinema history, intrigued him enough to conduct further research and to eventually write this interesting, witty, and even scandalous book.

Do not look at *MGM: Saving The Best for Last* as a scholarly history of the studio. Although Ziarko does include spreadsheets of costs and profits as well as technical details for MGM productions between 1946 and 1960, this is more a tome for the trivia buff or hobbyist.

The volume is awkwardly divided into six sections, moving from the broadest perspective to the most intimate. There is a section called "The Studio," which includes an essay and accompanying budget spreadsheet for each year from 1946 to 1960. This is followed by "The Schary Years," which takes a look at the merits and faults of individual films. "The Stars" is the section for the film buff who loves gossip.

Although much of what Ziarko offers is his interpretation, he writes with good humor and unabashed honesty. "The Scroll of Shame" includes a look at "The Ten Most Boring People in Screen History," which is almost too acrimonious, as Ziarko introduces Merle Oberon as "A Shameless Slut who Screwed Her Way To The Top" and goes after Clint Eastwood, suggesting that "it's time to pack it in."

Without any sort of index and with a smattering of acronyms buried as an aside in the first section (CDC=Career Destroying Catastrophe, MTTHW=More Trouble Than He's Worth), it's a tough book to appreciate as a narrative or reference. Try looking up a particular picture of interest and you will need to know roughly what year it was made. Thankfully, the actors and actresses are listed alphabetically within their section.

As *MGM: Saving The Best for Last* is largely a snapshot of the last decades of the studio's most successful years, it is fitting that the cover art depicts a lion walking out of the last rays of sun fading across his land. It's an appropriate and clever metaphor.

Ziarko shares a wealth of knowledge and experience in this unique volume. He makes it clear that it "doesn't fit the standard publishing template" and that it is the book he wanted to write and the book he wanted to publish. "[He] didn't do it for you." Nevertheless, it is an addictive read for the Hollywood buff and anyone interested in the technical backstory of MGM during its heyday.

SARA BUDZIK (March 4, 2014)

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