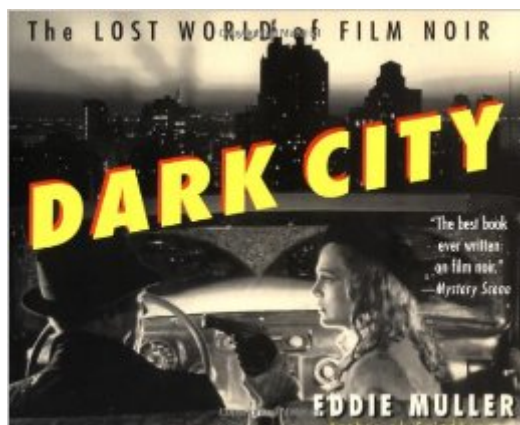


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Dark City: The Lost World Of Film Noir



Synopsis

Welcome to Dark City, urban landscape of the imagination. A place where the men and women who created film noir often find themselves dangling from the same sinister heights as the silver-screen avatars to whom they gave life. Eddie Muller, who led readers on a guided tour of the seamier side of motion pictures in Grindhouse: The Forbidden World of 'Adults Only' Cinema, now takes us on a spellbinding trip through treacherous terrain: Hollywood in the post-World War II years, when art, politics, scandal, style--and brilliant craftsmanship--produced a new approach to moviemaking, and a new type of cultural mythology. Dark City is a 1999 Edgar Award Nominee for Best Critical / Biographical Work.

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Customer Reviews

"Dark City" is a journey through the world of classic film noir, from World War II to 1960, guided by pop culture critic Eddie Muller. This isn't a book of film theory, but a guided tour of this deliciously cynical genre that was the unique product of a disintegrating studio system, volatile politics, and simultaneous post-war disillusionment and hubris. "Dark City" is Muller's attempt to make these films vivid and irresistible for a new audience. In this, he succeeds. Throughout the book, he refers to "Dark City" as if it were a place to which we might travel to take in the stark scenery and odd inhabitants. By the time I finished this book, I felt as if it is. -A peculiar place born of circumstances long past, that is gloriously preserved in movies. "Dark City" is divided into eleven chapters, each addressing a sub-genre of film noir. Truthfully, there would be a lot of overlap if you wanted to be strictly accurate in categorizing noirs. But "Dark City"'s organization is a very effective method of

introducing the reader to these films by pointing out common themes. Notice that the chapter titles name figurative places located within Dark City: "Welcome to Dark City" is about crime dramas, "The Precinct" about films that feature law enforcement officers, "Hate Street" about murderous suburbanites, "Shamus Flats" about private detective films, "Vixenville" about femmes fatales, in "Blind Alley" the events of life are beyond human control, "The Psych Ward" features films that took place in V.A. hospitals, "Knockover Square" is about heist flicks, "Loser's Lane"'s characters are sociopaths, "Thieves' Highway" introduces us to noirs that make use of the nation's new interstate highway system. Each chapter describes 30-40 films, in varying degrees of detail.

Lord knows film noir books are a dime a gross, but Eddie Muller's Dark City is one of the more entertaining and necessary to come out in many a year. Muller successfully walks a tightrope here between the overly academic, theory-mongering, insufferably highbrow type of book, and the shallow, campy, or nostalgia-drenched types at the other end of the spectrum, and he barely stumbles. Though he steadfastly refuses to take himself too seriously, his underlying devotion to the genre is evident throughout. Along with plenty of behind-the-scenes gossip he doesn't fail to provide solid descriptions and opinions of the movies in question, from such classics as *The Maltese Falcon* and *Kiss of Death* to semi-obscure gems like *T-Men*. As a film critic he has a "feet-on-the-ground" integrity and hits the bull's eye on most of the films he mentions (meaning I usually agree with him). He's particularly good on the caper-film subgenre. *Asphalt Jungle*, *Crime Wave*, and Kubrick's *The Killing* all get their rightful due, as does the career of Sterling Hayden. Indeed, one of the delights of *Dark City* is the engrossing profiles of various actors and actresses who made their mark on the genre, including Barbara Stanwyck, Richard Widmark, John Garfield, and the redoubtable Robert Ryan. Muller has a sharp eye for character actors as well. The structure of the book is tongue-in-cheek; equating the entire nebulous noir genre with a metaphorical city (the 'dark city' of the title), he breaks down the various themes and subgenres into chapters with place-name titles, such as "Shamus Flats" for the detective movie, "Knockover Square" for the caper film, and so on. If this sounds groan-inducing, don't worry.

Eddie Muller's noir compilation, *Dark City* is one of the finest books ever written about American cinema. The pages are filled with descriptive images that embody the essence of the greatest chapter in Hollywood film making- noir. If jazz is America's cultural contribution to music, then American film noir stands as the pinnacle contribution to the medium of motion pictures. Muller's book, *Dark City* is an enlightening testament to the creative genius of directors, actors, actresses,

and cinematographers associated with the creation of noir film making. Muller explores over one hundred of these dark films with interesting insights about the themes, scripts, lighting, and camera work that marked so many of them as classics. Muller cleverly divides the book's chapters into separate realms, where the danger of noir themes often thrived. The chapter "The Precinct" features expositions on Detective Story, Where The Sidewalk Ends, and On Dangerous Ground. "Shamus Flats", a section devoted to private investigators, critiques films such as: The Maltese Falcon and Out of the Past. These and other chapters are augmented with captivating black and white stills. Photographs of actors and actresses on lobby cards, movie posters, and frame shots adorn every page. What differentiates Dark City from other literary works written about cinema, is Muller's chilling and revelatory research on the private lives of the people marked by noir. In many instances the dangerous fiction of celluloid noir crossed into reality for many of its players and creators. Readers will absorb the mysterious details Muller exposes about noir stalwarts such as: Gene Tierney, Robert M'Carthy, Elizabeth Scott, Tom Neal, Ava Gardner, Dana Andrews, and Gloria Grahame to name just a few.

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