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Turner Classic Movies: The Essentials: 52 Must-See Movies And Why They Matter



Synopsis

Showcasing 52 Essential films from the golden age to the present, Turner Classic Movies invites you into a world filled with stirring performances, dazzling musical numbers, and bold directorial visions that mark the greatest moments in film history. These are movies that define what it means to be a classic. Readers can enjoy one film per week, for a year of stellar viewing, or indulge in their own classic movie festival.

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Customer Reviews

"[An] excellent book. Author Arnold distills why each movie is a must-see, and augments his knowledgeable text with sidebar quotes from various TCM hosts... Handsomely designed and packed with great photos, The Essentials would be a perfect gift for a young person who's just dipping his or her toe into these waters; but I found it equally appealing."; Leonard Maltin, leonardmaltin.com"An entertaining read... Beautifully-designed and illustrated... Author Jeremy Arnold does a superb job presenting the reasons why a particular film matters."; Raymond Benson, *Cinema Retro*

Jeremy Arnold, a writer and film historian, is the author of *Lawrence of Arabia: The 50th Anniversary*, a coffee-table book companion to that film's Blu-ray release. In addition to his work for numerous film trade publications, he has written over five hundred programming articles for the Turner Classic Movies website and contributed audio commentaries and historical essays to the DVD and Blu-ray releases of classic films. Jeremy lives in Los Angeles.

Jeremy Arnold's book *The Essentials: 52 Must-See Movies and Why They Matter* is marvelous. Like the movies it features, it is essential for any fan or student of classic cinema. It is essential for offering new and exciting insights into the films chosen, for devising and using an inviting format for their discussion, and for being a book that will require rereading when the chance arises to see the films (most likely on the Turner Classic Movies channel). Arnold's book is beautifully produced on fine paper with front and back covers invitingly composed. Before even opening the book, the reader can have some fun trying to identify the performers pictured, as well as the particular Essential film in which they appeared that is discussed, of course, in the book. The photo on the back cover should provide no trouble for anyone not living in a cave for the last 40 years. This book is graced with a foreword by Robert Osborne, who is, of course, the longtime and still principal host of Turner Classic Movies, who has been part of the TCM landscape since the beginning, i.e., 1994, when he was on the stage with Ted Turner and other notables to launch this essential channel. Osborne's foreword points out, among other tidbits, that the 52 films featured in this book were chosen from among the nearly 300 films that have been shown as part of the series since its debut in 2001. So, I guess these 52 are the *most essential* of the Essentials. As a simple but important stroke of genius, Arnold presents the 52 films in chronological order, beginning with *Metropolis* released in 1927 to *Spinal Tap* in 1984. Thus, we are treated to a panoply of films extending from near the end of the silent era through the Golden Age of Hollywood (and places elsewhere in the world) to the time of the *summer blockbuster* and beyond to a point now more than three decades ago. Since I am a loyal fan of TCM, I have seen all of the films featured in the book, except, somehow, for the last one, the

mockumentary. *Spinal Tap*. I am old enough to have seen some of these films for the first time in the original theatre release and others on TCM. The first I recall seeing in the theatre was *The Third Man*, released in 1949, when I was nine years old. Why I have that recollection is because I remember being bored stiff by this dark, convoluted drama playing out in the streets of post-war Vienna. I have a different opinion today. The films featured in this book were released over a span of 57 years. The decades most represented are the 1940s (14 films) and the 1950s (14), followed by the 1930s (11), which is perhaps understandable, since these are generally thought of as the decades comprising the Golden Age of Hollywood. Only eight films from the 1960s are included and three from the 1970s, with one each from the 1920s and the 1980s. The year most represented among the 57 covered is 1950, with four selections (*Winchester '73*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Gun Crazy*, and *All About Eve*). Interestingly, it is 1950 and not 1939 that is best

represented, inasmuch as the latter year is often thought to represent the pinnacle of film achievement; only *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Gone With the Wind* from the latter year are discussed. As one might imagine, most of the films were made by U.S. companies, but a few were done by foreign companies, including *Metropolis* (Germany), *The Red Shoes* (Britain), *The Bicycle Thief* (Italy), *The Third Man* (Britain), *Seven Samurai* (Japan), and *Breathless* (France). The U.S. companies best represented are United Artists, MGM, Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros., RKO, Columbia, and 20th Century Fox, all of great importance in contributing to the film medium as an art form. A long string of notable film directors was involved in making these films. I tried to guess as I was listing them who would be the standouts, but I was able to guess only two of the four directors with two or more films among the Essentials. The standout directors, which might not be much of a surprise, are Billy Wilder, with three films featured (*Double Indemnity*, *Sunset Blvd.*, and *Some Like It Hot*), and William Wyler, with the same number (*The Best Years of our Life*, *Roman Holiday*, and *Ben-Hur*). Frank Capra and Alfred Hitchcock are the runners-up, with two films each. The remainder of the directors made it onto the list on the strength of one film each, and in two cases as co-directors. The actors and actresses at the tops of the cast lists for these films perhaps should be more familiar to classic movie fans than even the directors. Most of the performers appear only once at the top of the cast, but there are four that appear twice, Clark Gable (for *It Happened One Night* and *Gone With the Wind*), Betty Davis (for *Now, Voyager* and *All About Eve*), James Stewart (for *Winchester '73* and *Rear Window*), and Gregory Peck (for *Roman Holiday* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*). The author Jeremy Arnold devised an inviting format for the discussion of each film. The first page lists the film title, the company that released it, the year of its release, its director, producer, screenplay authos, and cast list. A capsule statement of its plot is presented and either a poster or some shots of cast members. The longest portion of each chapter involves a discussion of *Why It's Essential*. These sections comprise the centerpiece of the book; they are what allow Jeremy Arnold to show off his stuff. No matter how much the reader thinks he or she knows about a given film, there will be something in each one of these evaluations that will be new and interesting. In addition, each chapter offers a short assessment by Robert Osbourne and a few comments by whomever joined Osbourne during the telecast of the films included. Finally, each chapter concludes with information on *What to Look For*, which obviously should be read before any viewing or reviewing of the film in question. I highly recommend this book to readers with an interest in classic films and suggest that it be kept within reach near the television set. Even better, I suggest that the reader check the TCM website and compile a schedule for the next showing of the 52 films covered in this amazingly informative and entertaining book.

This book is fascinating! Love the trivia and the "what to look for" in the film section. Great write up and pictures. A great read.

A great book to add to any movie lovers collection especially if you are into classic film. It's not just another review and ratings book, but looks at the impacts of these 52 movies and how they impacted culture and the movie industry as well.

I bought one for me and, later, one as a gift. It's a great read that makes you want to see (or see again) each movie - without spoiling them. The pictures are also great, with many behind-the-scenes, which are cool. I studied film in college many years ago, and this felt like a refresher course.

Really enjoyed this book. Gives lots of background of the working relationships with the actors and directors. Which actors turned down a movie and the second choice made the movie a hit. Can't understand why the good, the bad & the ugly didn't make the list. If you like old movies and the history about it in a short read. You will like this book.

More than enough info on some of the best classic movies. I am enjoying reading this book and then viewing each movie, some for the first time.

It's a beautiful book well made and wonderful photos and marvelous comments

Works well both as a reference book and as a straight read-through.

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