

Chronicles of Terror: Silent Screams

Steve Haberman

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By the end of the 1920s, sound in films was firmly established as a commercial necessity. With the death of Lon Chaney in 1930, America's foremost apostle of the weird and morbid in cinema was gone. In Germany, financial collapse and frightening political upheavals drove filmmakers to abandon the supernatural for the grim realities of modern life.

But the silent era had introduced most of the major themes of the horror film that would be revisited and explored for the remainder of the century. Manmade monsters, vampires, soulless robots, Satanists, witches, sex killers, deformed maniacs, mad scientists, giant dinosaurs, ghosts and the Devil himself had all been subjects in the medium's first two decades. The genre had even produced enduring masterpieces such as The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The Golem, Barrymore's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Haxan, Nosferatu, The Phantom of the Opera, Metropolis, Galeen's remake of The Student of Prague, The Unknown and West of Zanzibar.

Steve Haberman, with Silent Screams, the first book in his horror tome Chronicles of Terror, offers a loving tribute to silent horror films, works which would form a strong foundation for the filmic terrors yet to come.



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