TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Libraries™

BOOK REVIEW OF "THE SATANIC SCREEN: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE DEVIL IN CINEMA"

The Texas Tech community has made this publication openly available. [Please share](#) how this access benefits you. Your story matters to us.

Citation	Weiner, R.G. (2004). [Review of the book The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema by Schreck, Nikolas]. Journal of Popular Culture, 37(3), 534-537. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2004.084_3.x
Citable Link	http://hdl.handle.net/2346/1538
Terms of Use	CC-BY

However, this culture of control, while dominant, never succeeded in stamping out the persistent culture of chance. Lears documents an extraordinary number of ways that gambling and other number games prevailed in the nineteenth century. Legal and illegal games of faro, blackjack, and poker were commonplace, as were lotteries and other card games. But luck, as Lears takes pains to illustrate, was not simply about gaming, for the attraction to chance was far more than recreational. Divination, bibliomancy, magic, and faith in sacred objects were widespread as well; important decisions often were made through these means. In a world of high mortality, social upheaval, and economic fluctuation, chance made sense.

To be sure, there are limitations to his argument. Lears could be justly criticized for having a rooting interest; the story might be “control versus chance,” but the storyteller seems to be squarely on the side of chance. And while his evidence is strong and plentiful when discussing gambling and lotteries, it is thinner when discussing other elements of the culture of luck and randomness. Lears succeeds in illustrating that the culture of chance is about far more than gambling (in both tangible and intangible ways), but he does not fully flesh out this part of the story.

Limitations rather than flaws, these issues hardly interfere with enjoyment of the book. His book is wondrously engaging, impressively researched, and full of fascinating insight. Lears has written a fresh account that is not simply about luck, but about luck as an entrée into American culture. He succeeds in convincing us that the conflict between chance and control is a central one, and that we can understand the last two hundred years of United States history in these terms. In *Something for Nothing*, the cultures of chance and control do not spar offstage. They are the main event.

David Hecht
Harvard University

The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema.
Nikolas Schreck. London: Creation Books, 2001.

The Satanic Screen is entry 17 in Creation Books’s fine series on extreme cinema. It looks at how the devil has been portrayed

throughout the history of film. Satan's depiction in film dates back to George Melies's 1896 *La Manoir Du Diable* (*The Devil's Manor*). Movies have been the devil's domain from the very beginning. Certain early films such as *Haxan*, *Leaves from Satan's Book*, *Sorrows of Satan*, and *Faust* have become notorious among horror aficionados, and these films, among many lost gems, are covered in detail.

The most interesting look at Satan in film comes from the period between 1930 and 1970, which Schreck sees as the "golden age of Satanic Cinema." Films that fans may not have considered "genuine" horror are covered, including *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, *Heaven Can Wait*, and *Cabin in the Sky*. One of the most striking performances of Satan is Walter Huston's portrayal in *The Devil and Daniel Webster* where he plays ol' Scratch with relish. The usual suspects—*Rosemary's Baby*, *The Devil Rides Out*, *Black Sunday*—are covered, along with more obscure releases such as *The Devil's Eye*, *Incubus* (starring a young William Shatner), and the Mexican children's film *Santa Claus* (made famous as one of the best episodes of Mystery Science Theatre 3000).

Schreck sees Satanic movies of the seventies, eighties, and nineties as a vast wasteland with a few exceptions (such as Polanski's *Ninth Gate*). Filmmakers during these periods produced Satanic films of little intelligence focusing on shock effects and sensationalist scriptwriting. Even films that are often considered the "Holy Grail" to horror fans are ripped apart. *The Exorcist's* view of Satan is referred to as "artistically uninteresting," and the "most laughable presentations of the Devil on screen." *The Omen* is referred to as an evangelical solicitation for Christianity. Despite the breath of films covered (Satan in porn films is even discussed), a discussion of Satan's portrayal in feature films produced by Christian companies such as *Thief in the Night*, *Image of the Beast*, and Cloud Ten's enormously popular *Tribulation Left Behind*, *Apocalypse*, and *The Omega Code* would have added more credibility to the overall text.

The Satanic Screen, however, is an excellent book. It reads well and is wonderfully illustrated with many photos from obscure films. As Schreck shows, filmmaking about the devil has a wide and varied history. Satan has come from the charming debonair trickster in the earlier films to the sinister and macabre figure of today's movies. A discussion of Satanic prefilm plays such as the "magic lantern spectacles" of the seventeenth century, and Aleister Crowley's role in film is included as an added bonus to the overall text. Crowley was the

inspiration for 1926's *The Magician*, in which Paul Wegener plays the Crowley character. An index of all of the films referred to throughout the book is provided for easy access to information about specific films. This book deserves a wide readership, especially by film scholars. Academic and public libraries with strong film collections should certainly purchase this title.

Robert G. Weiner
Mahon Library
Lubbock, Texas

Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity. Siva Vaidhyanathan. New York: NYU Press, 2001.

Owning Culture: Authorship, Ownership, and Intellectual Property Law. Kembrew McLeod. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

Communications professor Kembrew McLeod opens his study of intellectual property law's impact on contemporary American culture, *Owning Culture*, with an account of his mildly subversive and ultimately successful efforts to trademark the phrase "freedom of expression." This ironic act and its obvious humorous (and chilling) side effects characterize the irreverent and challenging tone of McLeod's work, which explores everything from biotech corporations' efforts to patent genes to the music industry's restriction of sampling (the process by which musicians incorporate bits and pieces of other recordings into their own work to form new compositions). Similarly, in *Copyrights and Copywrongs*, Siva Vaidhyanathan, a professor of "Information Studies," insightfully and at times playfully probes some of the more perplexing moments in the history of American copyright law. Though neither work forms a comprehensive study of intellectual property law in America, either would serve as an effective introduction to the complex dynamics and far-reaching implications of these laws in the United States today.

Both authors strike a polemical stance, arguing for stricter limits on intellectual property protection and against corporate uses of the law that inhibit the growth of culture and exploit disadvantaged peoples.

Copyright of Journal of Popular Culture is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.