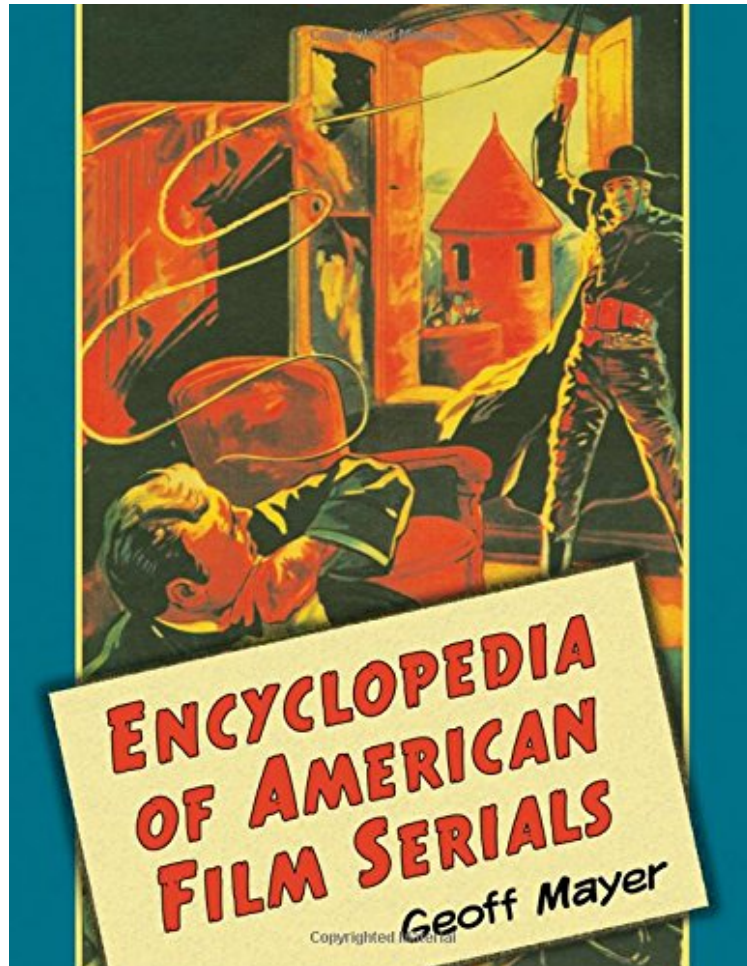


## Encyclopedia of American Film Serials

*Geoff Mayer*

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**Geoff Mayer : Encyclopedia of American Film Serials** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Encyclopedia of American Film Serials:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Extensive survey of forgotten films By Kevin Brianton Film serials are often an after thought in film history. They were on before the main attraction in suburban cinemas. Each chapter was screened at a movie theatre for one week and concluded with a cliffhanger, in which characters found themselves in perilous situations with little apparent chance of escape. Many people spent their childhood arguing over how the hero would escape the previous weeks cliffhanger. Viewers then had to return each week to see the cliffhangers resolved and to follow the continuing story. The arrival of TV in the 1950s meant that TV shows would take the mantle. Their slightly downbeat reputation is not well deserved as serials played a clear role in cultural history. Mayer has helped give serials the type of coverage they deserve. Mayer provides tremendous insight into the political and social background of this 20th century American cultural phenomenon; exploring a cultural form that lives with us

today. Films such as Indiana Jones series and many TV shows such as 24 owe a huge amount to these shows. It is an extraordinary extensive survey coupled with an impressive index. Mayer provides both a scholarly tour of the area and shows a great love for the almost forgotten art form.<sup>2</sup> 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A great resource

By Graham Slater I found this to be an excellent history of a lost form of entertainment. It is well researched and presented. Melodrama sets the cornerstones for much of the visual narrative today's media literate audiences possess. Much of the exaggeration in terms of facial expression comes from the silent era when the message needed to be carried by means other than voice. Many of the codes and conventions of film and TV were created in melodrama and continue to give audiences cues as to what to expect next! To me these look like Historical Time capsules. They reflect the fashions and values much better than Hollywood film does. They also look like they preceded commercial half hour television programs. An enjoyable read and valuable reference. Graham Slater 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Comprehensive, Perceptive, and Accessible

By H. Charles Fox Geoff Mayers volume is a welcome and timely addition to the literature on the American serial. There is no lack of commentary but most of it falls into the category of enthusiastic fan discussion. These often dwell on some newly discovered piece of information about an actor, director, or circumstance of production. Often, there seems to be more and more effort expended about less and less. Mayers Encyclopedia is something different, a sustained reflection on the nature, history, and dramatic movement of the serial form. Don't be worried that Mayers work is an esoteric commentary. It has plenty for the dedicated fan, it just does so much more than that!

The introduction *The Melodramatic Imagination and the Serial* is a gem. Mayer carefully explores the nature of the serial as melodrama which taps into the zeitgeist of moments in American cultural and political history. It is certainly true no serial could be truly successful if it failed to embody the feelings and mood of the time, no matter how contradictory they might be. Mayer has not only provided an outstandingly thorough reference work but explored this connection between society and serial. Particularly good is his comparison of Universal's *Tailspin Tommy* (1934) with Universal's 1936 smash hit *Flash Gordon*. Although these serials are only two years apart they are, culturally, worlds apart. *Tailspin Tommy* with its simple small town values was predicated on a world fast disappearing while *Flash Gordon* worked on a dual level by presenting a grand adventure for children with an erotic journey for mature audiences. There are also some important and new elements in the discussion. A special aspect of the book is a detailed account, based on Mayers access to the 1940 shooting script, of Republic's *Mysterious Doctor Satan*. It traces the transformation of this excellent serial from the original plan to produce the first screen version of the Superman comic script (*The Adventures of Superman*) to its release as *Mysterious Doctor Satan*. And it really is thorough. The book contains an entry on every Republic serial (66 in total), most serials released by Universal, Columbia, Pathe and Mascot along with key actors, directors (especially the masterful Republic duo of William Witney and John English) composers and the serial producing studios. In other words, the book is a comprehensive, perceptive and accessible account of a unique facet of American cinema that lasted from 1912 to 1956. If you have even a passing interest in the genre, it is essential to get hold of this book.

From their heyday in the 1910s to their lingering demise in the 1950s, American film serials delivered excitement in weekly installments for millions of moviegoers, despite minuscule budgets, nearly impossible shooting schedules and the disdain of critics. Early heroines like Pearl White, Helen Holmes and Ruth Roland broke gender barriers and ruled the screen. Through both world wars, such serials as *Spy Smasher* and *Batman* were vehicles for propaganda. Smash hits like *Flash Gordon* and *The Lone Ranger* demonstrated the enduring mass appeal of the genre. Providing insight into early 20th century American culture, this book analyzes four decades of productions from Pathe, Universal, Mascot and Columbia, and all 66 Republic serials.

"simply stated, no personal, professional, community, or academic library American Film Industry History collection or supplemental studies reading lists would be considered comprehensive or complete without including a copy of *Encyclopedia of American Film Serials*"--Midwest Book .About the Author Geoff Mayer was, until 2015, head of the School of Social Sciences at La Trobe University (Australia) and prior to that he was head of the School of Communication, Arts and Critical Enquiry. His teaching areas include film history and film genre.