



American Prison Film Since 1930: From the Big House to the Shawshank Redemption

David Jr. Gontheir

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This book studies a number of well-known prison films from an analytical and historical perspective. Throughout the years, prison movies have appeared to be neglected within the canon of genres like westerns, screwball comedies, horror films and the like; they have been recognized merely an adjunct subgenre to the more prominent genres like gangster films. The prison movie is indeed its own separate genre, and the book proves this by utilizing existing genre criticism, especially from leading scholars like Thomas Schatz. Although there have been a number of cross-genre films (Blade Runner is a fusion of science fiction, film noir, and action/adventure; Star Wars is a science fiction western action film, etc.), the prison movie is perhaps the only pure-bred genre that yields so many other genres within its original framework: gangster prison films (The Big House), film noir prison films (Brute Force), western prison films (There Was a Crooked Man), sports prison films (The Longest Yard), science fiction prison films (Escape from New York), the POW film (Stalag 17), even musicals (Chicago). In addition to surveying the genre from 1930-2000, the book deconstructs twelve films in great detail through full annotated summaries based on the codes and conventions of the proposed genre - films like Stalag 17, Cool Hand Luke, Midnight Express, Escape from Alcatraz, and The Shawshank Redemption are among the films considered.



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