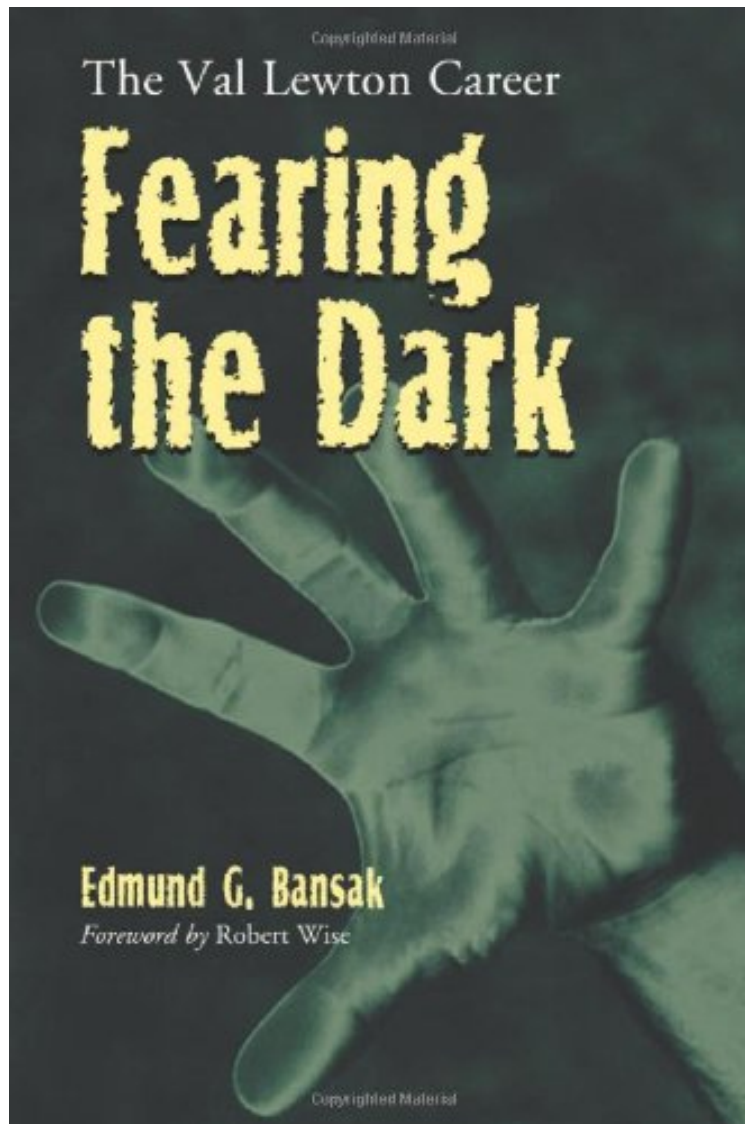


(Download) Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career

## Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career

*Edmund G Bansak*

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**Edmund G Bansak : Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Low budget brilliance was his specialtyBy krebsmanWhat made me interested in Val Lewton was learning that he grew up in the exotic mansion of his aunt Alla Nazimova, a flamboyant Ukrainian actress in the Sara Bernhardt tradition, who was also the real-life prototype for SUNSET BOULEVARDS Norma Desmond. What kind of man did that strange little boy grow up to be? This book is not really a biography, but a survey of Lewtons work and his influence on the development of the narrative film. Lewton is considered an

American auteur, which is somewhat unusual because he was not a director, but a producer (who anonymously rewrote the scripts of his films). He had to work with very small budgets and create films from titles chosen by the studio. His first film for RKO was CAT PEOPLE. From that title, he came up with an intelligent and atmospheric horror film in which the chills come primarily from what the audience imagines, rather than what it actually sees. And thus began a dizzying 4-year period in which he created eleven feature films for RKO that included I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE, THE LEOPARD MAN, CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE, and THE BODY SNATCHER. The films were well-done despite the low budgets, primarily because Lewton was able to use the talent that RKO had acquired through their deal with Orson Welles Mercury Theatre, including editors Mark Robson and Robert Wise. Lewton allowed them to direct. The first three Lewton films for RKO were directed by Jacques Tourneur, who learned his craft from his famous father Maurice Tourner. Tourner, Wise, and Robson all went on to major Hollywood careers. After the discussion of Lewton's career, Bansak includes chapters about each of them and a final survey of other films that have been influenced by the Lewton touch. It seems to me that the central concern of this book is an examination of just what IS the Lewton touch. First of all, the scripts were literate. Lewton was very well read and drew heavily upon classic literature for his inspiration. I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE is a Caribbean retelling of JANE EYRE. (A resourceful female protagonist is often a feature of these films.) The men who made these films, Wise in particular, had extensive experience in radio. The soundtracks for these films achieve a lot of the effects of the Lewton touch (the Lewton Bus!). Because of the low budgets, the lighting was deliberately kept dim most of the time, but the directors of photography Lewton hired (most notably Nicholas Musuraca) excelled at working in that kind of lighting. Often in the Lewton films there is a long scary walk in the dark when there is no music, the only sounds heard are footsteps or a cracking twig. The Lewton walk was a huge influence on suspense films. This book is basically excellent, although I'm not so sure the final chapter was really worth including as the point had already been made. I learned a great deal from reading FEARING THE DARK and I was entertained, too. I was able to see a few of the films discussed in the book on TCM while I was reading the book. I was really able to appreciate them in ways I could not before. Five stars. 32 of 32 people found the following review helpful. The Master of atmosphere. By Birthe B. McFarland Co. have published many fine books on film folks, and this is one of my favorites. Not only because I'm a big fan of the Lewton productions, but it's a brilliantly written book. Lewton was responsible for some of the best so-called Horror movies ever made, like "I Walked With A Zombie", "The Body Snatcher" and "Curse Of The Cat People". -All favorite films of mine. The book naturally covers all the famous thrillers, but it also tells the story of his relatively short life. I especially like the anecdote about how Lewton apparently once tossed away the script for "Gone With The Wind", calling it sentimental trash !. -Way to go, Val - I couldn't agree more. Lewton really knew what it took to make a good and eerie movie full of atmosphere, but film-makers of today sadly seem to have forgotten all about this. -Suspense is not something you can SEE, it's something you're supposed to FEEL. Director Robert Wise later showed what he learned in the "Lewton school", when he gave us the original "The Haunting". Director Jan De Bont recently showed us he didn't pay attention in his class. He, and everybody else ought to read this wonderful book. 17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. A brief window into Val Lewton's legacy. By Winthrop Harrison This book has been out of print for a good many years. Still, if you logged onto this entry, you must be a fan, a TRUE fan. Since you are, this book is certainly for you, adding a little personal information on a producer who absorbed and delivered the sensitive, innovative, and intelligent work that most horror profiteers can't. The concept of producer is misleading and mostly boring. Often, the producer is the guy who pays for the filmed project - a guy who considers the money angle, considers the production costs, and goes home at the end of the day. (Mr. Jerry 'Pearl Harbor' Bruckheimer I'm looking at you. Shame on you....) Other times there are 'producers' who are assigned by movie studios to deliver the movie on time, and on budget. Val Lewton was one of those producers, given an assignment, and always a subordinate of the RKO film system. Yeah, it was/is a bad system, but there were producers who not only 'oversaw' film but were a creative part of those same projects. There have been so FEW of them. Val Lewton was one of them. What a legacy. Val Lewton's productions had a talented staff and even better directors. Considering the budget of those epic films ('Cat People', its sequel, 'The Body Snatcher') it's astonishing how vital these films are. I don't have alloted time to tell you, but Carol Reed's 'The Third Man,' Hitchcock's 'Psycho' shower scene, and many other films owe a debt to Lewton's creative influence. Val Lewton created a profound influence that's here with us today. But you already know that. That's why you clicked on to my review. Buy this book.

Cat People (1942) and I Walked with a Zombie (1943) established Val Lewton's hauntingly graceful style where suggestion was often used in place of explicit violence. His stylish B thrillers were imitated by a generation of filmmakers such as Richard Wallace, William Castle, and even Walt Disney in his animated Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad (1949). Through interviews with many of Lewton's associates (including his wife and son) and extensive research, his life and output are thoroughly examined.

"well researched, insightful and rewarding""excellent...masterful...recommended"--Classic Images; "well researched, insightful and rewarding"--Filmfax; "a definitive study of his career...the finest study of the subject I have read.

Perceptive, revealing and extensively researched. My favorite show business book of 1995"--The Other Side of Show Business; "it is difficult to imagine [this book] will be superseded"--SFRA ; "remarkable...fills a much needed void in providing a wealth of biographical detail about Lewton and his work"--Cornerstone Magazine; "fans of Lewton will find this a wonderful read crammed with fascinating details of Lewton's schizoid personality and his unique working methods"--Bright Lights Film Journal; "exhaustively researched chronicle"--Rue Morgue; "Drawing on extensive interviews with Lewton's family and associates, Bansak's detailed account is unlikely to be superseded."--Neil Barron, Editor of Fantasy and Horror. About the Author Edmund G. Bansak lives in Wales, Massachusetts.