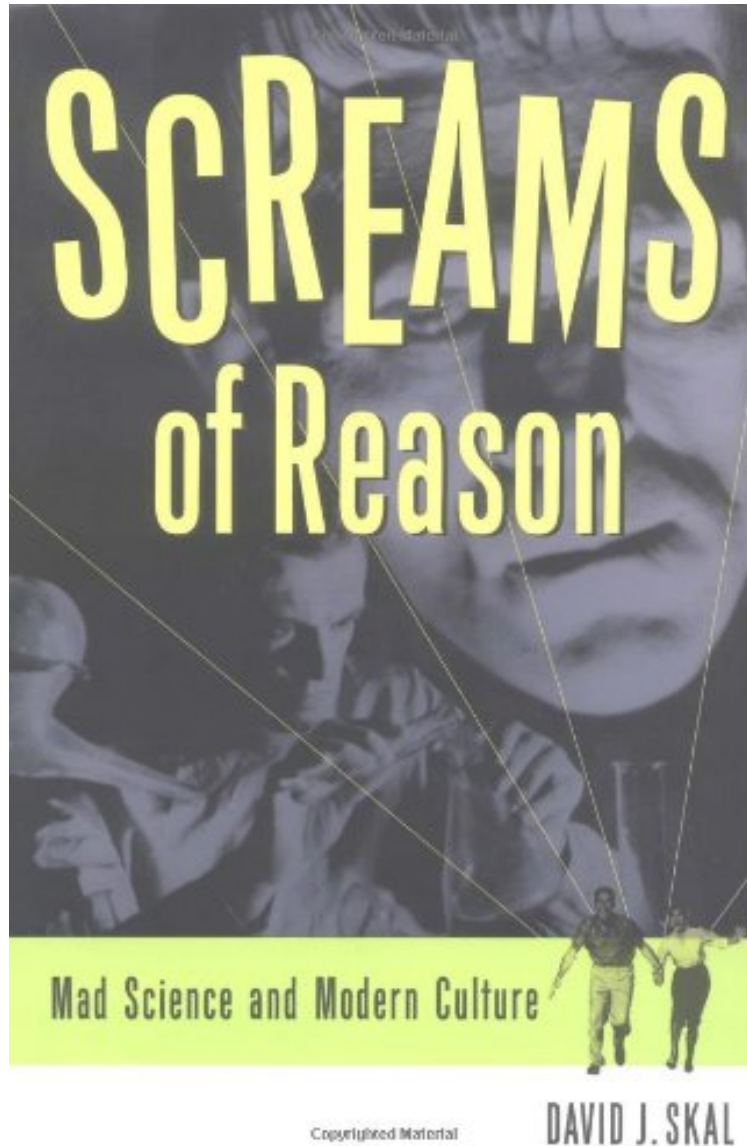


[Get free] Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture

## Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture

*David J. Skal*

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**David J. Skal : Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A fun romp into the mad world of cinematic science.By Thomas S FlowersNot Skal's best work, but definitely a fun romp into the realm of science fiction and horror as it pertains to cinematic history. The focus here is mainly on mad science, so if you're on the hunt for a more broad spectrum of

horror, BE SURE to read *Monster Show*. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I love his work I love his book he spoke at ...By Michael Ormond I love his work I love his book he spoke at my college years ago and I've been dying to read it since it is worth the wait. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful history of Dr. Frankenstein and his ilk By Adam P. Lounsbury After publishing books on horror films in American culture, the career of filmmaker Tod Browning, and the history of Dracula from Bram Stoker onward, David J. Skal has chosen to explore the role of the mad scientist in literature and film during the last two centuries. His book, "Screams of Reason: Mad Science in Modern Culture," begins with Mary Shelley's conception of Dr. Frankenstein and his monster, touches on Drs. Jekyll and Moreau, and finally moves on to the twentieth century and its attendant griefs - including, but not limited to, the threat of nuclear war and the career of writer Robin Cook. Skal's main thesis - and it's a good one - is that the public's fear and distrust of scientists and technological innovation has been reflected primarily in the arena of popular entertainment. Skal writes well about the uneasy relationship most people have with science (ie, fearful and antagonistic on the one hand, but unable to live without cars, phones, and computers on the other). The best part of this book is the first half, which mostly deals with Dr. Frankenstein and his monster. From the life of Mary Shelley to the theatrical and film adaptations of her famous novel, the first half of "Screams of Reason" is fascinating and compelling reading. The second half is also interesting, but is sometimes so fragmented and tangential that Skal's main points are lost. Also, he seems unable throughout the second half to draw very many definite conclusions, allowing quotes and examples to simply stand on their own. "Screams of Reason" is most valuable as a sourcebook on Dr. Frankenstein and his ilk, and as a very enjoyable book about popular culture. A wealth of deep insights into the role of the mad scientist in films of the twentieth century will have to be provided by the reader, however.

From "Frankenstein" to "Jurassic Park", the mad scientist is one of the modern world's most instantly recognizable cultural icons. This is an exploration of popular culture's perennial fascination with demented doctors, crazed clinicians, and technologically obsessed fiends. A prototype outsider, shunted off to the sidelines of serious discourse - to B-movies, pulp novels and comic books - the mad scientist, the author argues, serves as a necessary lightning rod for otherwise unbearable anxieties about the consequences of modern science and technology. Skal chronicles the mad scientist's quest for world domination, from 19th-century literature to the snap-crackle-scream apotheosis of 1930s Hollywood to the mad-science mystique that colours the cult of the computer, UFO abduction folklore, and the demonization of contemporary medicine.

.com The words "mad scientist" inevitably summon up the picture of a deranged, obsessive individual with a lab coat and bad hair, working on some grandiose project that probably means trouble for humanity at large. Behind this cartoonish figure, however, lurks a complex series of ideas, emotions, stereotypes, and archetypes. In *Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture*, David J. Skal investigates the whole issue of "our multilevel cultural waltz with the maniac in the lab coat" over the last two centuries. The first few chapters focus on the origins of the mad-science mentality in the early 19th century. The age of Darwin and the Industrial Revolution saw the birth of many of the stock figures and themes of horror and science fiction: Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, Dr. Moreau; creation of new life forms, contravention of natural law, science out of control. Then, in the early 20th century, the new medium of film helped make all of these into staples of popular culture. Succeeding chapters deal with types and trends in the mad-science phenomenon, touching on a variety of subjects, such as the classic horror movies of the 1930s, nuclear-age mutation and invasion fantasies, medical horror, the union of man and machine, apocalyptic entertainment, and "Alien Chic." Movies certainly play a significant role in the whole mad-science phenomenon; *Screams*, however, is much more than a catalog of the classic horror and sci-fi entries. Skal's insightful, eloquent history gets at the psychological and social roots of our uneasy relationship with science and technology, and our attempts to master the fear of them. *Screams* includes abundant notes, many black-and-white illustrations, and an appendix listing dozens of mad scientists from popular culture. Highly recommended. --M.V. Burke From Publishers Weekly Art imitates life, which imitates art in this witty and knowing exploration of "mad science" and modern culture. The demonic scientist of pulp novels, B movies, and comic books is extraordinarily popular, says Skal (*Hollywood Gothic; The Monster Show*), because he "serve[s] as a lightning rod for otherwise unbearable anxieties about the meaning of scientific thinking and the uses and consequences of modern technology." Skal ranges from Victor Frankenstein to Dr. Moreau, from Dr. Jekyll to Dr. Frank N. Furter of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in his entertaining analysis. The author is equally at home with Hollywood trivia and with postmodern cultural analysis which identifies a gay subtext in horror films and finds the evocation of an "all-male reproductive paradigm" in the Bride of Frankenstein monster's deep forehead scar (a symbolic vulva!). Skal shows how cultural anxieties about race, gender and class roles, technological changes, economic depression and threats of war found their way into horror classics. Of particular interest are Skal's views on UFO sightings which he finds always correlate with periods of intense social unrest and "mad medicine" as seen in such works as *Coma* and *Silence of the Lambs* (he sees Hannibal Lecter as "an inevitable... iconic representation" of the perceived greed of big medicine in the HMO era). Skal even associates the recent spate of blockbuster invasion fantasies with fear of AIDS. Though Skal's analysis sometimes lacks sufficient depth, it is always

fresh, hip and lively. The book is illustrated with 100 well-chosen photos and period illustrations. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sA remarkably detailed survey of a much-neglected cultural icon by a leading historian of horror films (Dark Carnival, 1995, etc.). As Skal points out, the mad scientist has been a central figure in science fiction from its beginnings: Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll, and Dr. Moreau are among those whose names any reader of the genre would recognize instantly. And yet, the true blossoming of this ambiguous stereotype has not taken place in the pages of literary science fiction but rather in film, comics, and other less ``respectable" media. After taking a brief look at the deeper implications of the iconnotably, a public awareness that the gifts of science are often of dubious value to the ordinary citizenSkal lifts off for a wide-ranging examination of some resonances between sci-fi and daily life, centered on a history of the monster movie. Drawing parallels between the Heaven's Gate cult and the Frankenstein monster, Skal examines the origins of Mary Shelley's famous novel, moving deftly between the circumstances of its composition and the Romantic social theories of which it was one expression. As a counterpoint, the illustrations show the faces of various Hollywood screen embodiments of the Frankenstein monster. This dialogue between the cerebral and the sensual, the literary and the popular, gives Skal's book an unusual breadth of reference. In a similar vein, the book segues between the career of Nikola Tesla, a real-life prototype of the mad scientist, and early sci-fi movies by the likes of Melies and Edison (who produced the first film version of Frankenstein!). Skal's familiarity with his subject is second to none, and his interest in significant intellectual and cultural issues, as well as the usual ephemera of film histories, is an added treat. Should appeal to serious students of modern culture, along with sci-fi movie fans. -- Copyright 1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.