



WAR EAGLES - The Unmaking of an Epic - An Alternate History for Classic Film Monsters

David Conover, Philip J. Riley

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This latest addition to Philip J Riley's Alternate History of Classic Film Monsters series is a collaborative effort with fellow film historian David Conover that delves into one of the most famous unproduced motion pictures of all time, Merian C. Cooper's legendary WAR EAGLES! Planned as a full Technicolor production at MGM in the late 1930s, WAR EAGLES would have eclipsed Cooper and long-time SFX partner Willis O'Brien's KING KONG as the greatest fantasy epic of the period had it not fallen victim to pre-war studio politics and the rise of Hitler's Third Reich on the eve of World War II. Long considered a lost film effort, Conover's research has actually uncovered a richly detailed pre-production history, complete with never-before -published artwork, storyboards, test footage frames and more, direct from studio archives and the estates of technicians and artists who actually worked on the film. Also included is the full, never-published final draft of WAR EAGLES by Cyril Hume (screenwriter of MGM's Tarzan series and the sci-fi masterpiece FORBIDDEN PLANET) along with Merian C. Cooper's original treatment and production designer Howard Campbell's notes and budgets for the ill-fated production. For decades, stop-motion fans and film researchers considered an early, coverless draft attributed to Willis O'Brien-- but actually written by Harold Lamb and James Ashmore Creelman-- to be the only existing script for WAR EAGLES, but Conover's discovery of the original typescripts at the USC film library in 2003 turned up 7 more drafts and multiple revisions that eventually led to the final Hume draft. Pre-production artist Duncan Gleason began detailed storyboarding and illustration based on this draft and it is very likely that it would have become the actual shooting script. Detailed models and sets were built and Technicolor test footage featuring stop-motion animation by Willis O'Brien and his crew (including Kong/Mighty Joe Young creators Marcel Delgado and George Lofgren) was shot, and the exciting tale of a lost race of Viking warriors astride giant prehistoric eagles doing battle with Nazis over the skies of modern day Manhattan almost reached the screen until the reality of impending war halted production in 1940... David Conover is a film writer and historian who began his quest to uncover the history of WAR EAGLES as a 13-year-old reader of Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine. He was a columnist and reviewer for the Louisville Eccentric Observer for 9 years and his work was syndicated widely during that period as well. He is also the Vice President and Programming Director for WonderFest, an international modeling, toy, film and FX expo that takes place annually in Louisville, Ky, where he lives with his wife, daughter, and a tiny piece of the stegosaurus model from the original KING KONG. If you ask him, he'll show it to you, along with the final page of Cyril Hume's WAR EAGLES script. He's not crazy, just enthusiastic..

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