

= Flash Gordon (1954 TV series) =

Flash Gordon is a science fiction television series based on the characters of the Alex Raymond comic strip of the same name . Diverging from the storyline of the comics , the series set Flash , Dale Arden and Dr. Zarkov in the year 3203 . As agents of the Galactic Bureau of Investigation , the team travels the galaxy in their ship the Sky Flash , battling cosmic villains under the order of Commander Paul Richards .

The series was filmed in West Berlin and Marseille as a West German , French and American co production by Intercontinental Television Films and Telediffusion . The series aired in syndication throughout most of the U.S. but also aired on the east coast on the DuMont Television Network .

The series proved popular with American audiences and critical response , though sparse , was positive . Flash Gordon has garnered little modern critical attention . What little there is generally dismisses the series , although there has been some critical thought devoted to its presentation of Cold War and capitalist themes .

= = Cast = =

Steve Holland as Flash Gordon
Irene Champlin as Dale Arden
Joseph Nash as Hans Zarkov
Henry Beckman as Commander Richards

= = Production = =

Universal Studios had held the production rights to Flash Gordon but allowed them to lapse . Former Universal executives Edward Gruskin and Matty Fox struck a deal with Flash Gordon owners King Features Syndicate to produce the first 26 episodes of the series . The series was produced by Gruskin and Wenzel Lüdecke . Writers for Flash Gordon included Gruskin , Bruce Geller and Earl Markham . Episodes were directed by Wallace Worsley , Jr. and Gunther von Fritsch . Composers Kurt Heuser and Roger Roger provided much of the original music .

Shooting began in May 1953 , with an abandoned beer hall in Spandau serving as the principal shooting location . Among the cast and crew , only the lead actors and director Worsley spoke English . Worsley would recall the production difficulties this caused :

" No matter what galaxy we explored , everyone spoke with a German accent . The use of German actors who could not speak English required us to use a lot of close ups . I would stand behind the camera , correctly positioned for the actor 's look , and read his or her line ; the actor would then repeat the line , mimicking my pronunciation and emphasis . "

The series was budgeted at USD15,000 per episode on a three day per episode shooting schedule . Citing salary disputes , Worsley withdrew from the project after completing the first 26 episodes . Production was moved to Marseille under the direction of Gunther von Fritsch for the 13 final episodes .

= = Preservation status = =

Physical copies of two episodes , " Escape Into Time " (October 8 , 1954) and " The Witch of Neptune " (March 4 , 1955) , are held in the J. Fred MacDonald collection at the Library of Congress . A total of fourteen episodes are currently available in the public domain , both on various DVD releases and on websites such as the Internet Archive : Episodes 1 , 5 , 6 , 8 , 10 , 17 , 19 , 20 , 21 , 22 , 24 , 25 , 36 , and 39 .

= = Episodes = =

= = Critical response and themes = =

Variety noted that the series was from a technical standpoint " up to the demands of the script and the average viewer probably won 't notice the differences in quality between this and home @-@ grown produce " . Flash Gordon was immediately popular in the United States and continued to run in syndication into the early 1960s .

Modern critical reaction to the series has been light but largely negative . The production values are frequently derided , with the series described as " bargain @-@ basement " . The televised series suffered in comparison to the earlier film serials with the television incarnation labeled " vastly inferior , " lacking " good concepts and scripts " and " most of all , [lacking] Buster Crabbe , who was Flash Gordon " . One positive comment notes Champlin 's portrayal of Dale Arden , who was transformed from the typical damsel in distress of the serials into a trained scientist and a " quick thinker who often saved [Flash and Zarkov] from perishing " .

Film theorist Wheeler Winston Dixon , far from decrying the series for its production values , finds that " the copious [use of] stock footage and the numerous exterior sequences shot in the ruins of the bombed @-@ out metropolis give Flash Gordon a distinctly ravaged look " . He writes that its international origins give the series " an interesting new cultural dimension , even a perceptible air of a split cultural identity " . Dixon quotes German cultural historian Mark Baker , who writes of a particular scene from the episode The Brain Machine as emblematic of this cultural split . The scene uses stock footage of a June 17 , 1953 demonstration by East Berlin workers against the East German government . Soviet tanks opened fire on both demonstrators and bystanders , thus confirming East Germany 's status as a Soviet puppet state in the minds of West Germans . American viewers , Baker speculates , were probably unaware of the iconic power in West Germany of the images of fleeing East Berliners , which were used to illustrate a panic on Neptune .

Dixon , noting the similarities between the ideals espoused by " space operas " like Flash Gordon , Captain Video and Rocky Jones , Space Ranger and American Cold War values , argues that such series were designed to instill those values into their young viewers . Flash Gordon , he writes , along with its fellow space operas , " have a common , unifying theme : peace in the universe can be achieved only by dangerous efforts and the unilateral dominance of the Western powers . " This echoes the earlier critique of Soviet writer G. Avarin , who in the Soviet film journal Art of the Cinema had accused Gordon and other space @-@ faring characters of being " the vanguard of a new and greater ' American imperialism ' " . The " ravaged look " of the series , Dixon writes , " underscores the real @-@ world stage on which the action of the space operas played " .