

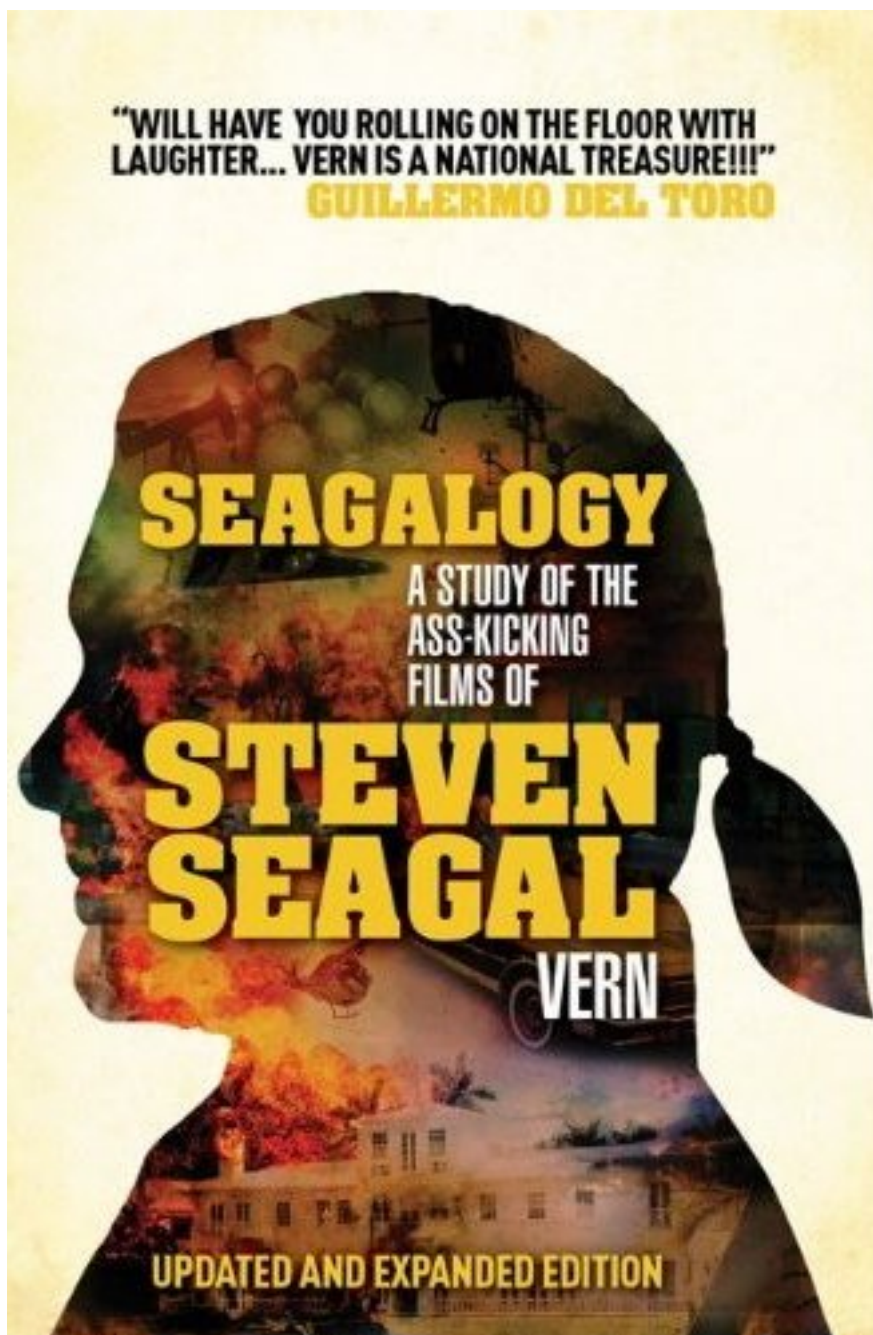
## Book Review: 'Seagalogy: A Study of the Ass-Kicking Films of Steven Seagal'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 7, 2012 - 2:09pm

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CHICAGO – Vern started his career as one of those snarky critics who wrote in to Harry Knowles' landmark and influential movie website Ain't It Cool News. He became a regular writer for the site and his work there turned him into a very unorthodox author. His first book was a fantastic examination of, believe it or not, the career of Steven Seagal. Newly updated with a dozen new chapters about the recent adventures of his subject matter (the first printing was in 2008), "Seagalogy: A Study of the Ass-Kicking Films of Steven Seagal" is a funny, clever read for fans of the unusual action star and those who have never seen one of his movies. Vern's movie-loving, smart, enjoyable writing makes this a more entertaining experience than Seagal himself has ever produced.

Don't worry. This is not tongue-in-cheek nonsense. To say that Vern takes his subject matter seriously would be a MASSIVE understatement. He clearly watched every one of Seagal's films multiple times, dissecting themes throughout them, noticing differences, and charting the trajectory of his career. And yet it's also no puff piece. Vern doesn't give Seagal any slack. He calls him out on his weirdness, bad acting, ego, etc. But he brilliantly wraps all of it together so the book becomes something fascinating in that it's an appreciation of someone who most people would argue doesn't really deserve an appreciation. I think Vern would claim that's why he makes such a great subject. He's not perfect. He's not an obvious choice. His career is kind of a mess. But Vern approaches him like he's completely deserving of 500 pages of detailed examination. And then writes with such style and humor that you won't regret his decision.



Seagalogy

Photo credit: Titan Books

In his intro (after a great one from writer/director David Gordon Green), Vern states that a "comic book nerd" friend helped him divide

Seagal's career into chapters and so the book is divided that way. The brief successful period of Seagal's film career opens the book with "Golden Era." Oh, yes, don't worry. This is not some biography about Seagal's odd background (he's made a number of claims through his life about his history). It focuses almost entirely on the films, dissecting them like a detailed review and then offering them context within Seagal's career and filmography. Vern brilliantly makes the case that we can learn more about Steven Seagal through his career choices and how he chooses to represent himself on film than through a typical biography. And have a hell of a lot more fun.

So, the "Golden Era" was from 1988-1991 and consists of "Above the Law," "Hard to Kill," "Marked For Death," and "Out For Justice." Some might argue that what Vern calls the "Silver Era" was actually a more profitable one for Seagal but Vern clearly prefers the work Seagal did in his first four films and makes a solid case that they were his best work. The "Silver Era" was from 1992-1997 and consists of "Under Siege" through "Fire Down Below."

After his first ten films, Seagal went through what Vern calls a "Transitional Period" from 1998-2002, ending with Seagal's last theatrical release in "Half Past Dead." It gets kind of ugly from here. The "DTV Era" consists of 16 films from 2003-2008 with titles like "Today You Die," "Shadow Man," and "Pistol Whipped." The updated material takes over here (and makes up about 100 pages) in the "Chief Seagal Era" from 2009 to present and more oddities like "Steven Seagal: Lawman," the actor's appearance in "Machete," and something called "Born to Raise Hell."

Vern doesn't just recap plot. He goes into incredible detail, charting actors who appeared across multiple films, recurring themes (Seagal likes bar fights), and much, much more. And he does so with style and wit. He can perfectly capture the foundation of "Marked For Death" with a passage like *"He breaks a lot of bones, shoots a guy in the throat, punches a guy in the balls, throws a guy out a window, etc. This movie has it all."* But just after that he's pointing how some of the scenes feel like deleted ones on a DVD.

It would be silly to deny that "Seagalogy" gets a little repetitive. So did Steven Seagal's career. But it's a nice book to read in chunks. Pick it up. Read about a silly B-movie that a former action icon made. Go back to something else. Not only will it make you appreciate its subject matter a bit more but the very art of how we write about movies. Vern does so from such a place of passion that it's infectious.

*The updated and expanded edition of "Seagalogy: A Study of the Ass-Kicking Films of Steven Seagal" by Vern was released on April 3, 2012.*



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