

Movies

CRITIC'S CHOICE

New DVD's

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The DEFA Sci-Fi Collection

This box set from First Run Features brings together three science-fiction epics produced by the East German studio DEFA (for Deutsche Film AG) - films set in a near future that already feels like a distant past. It's an interesting and entertaining lot, ranging from the relative sobriety of the 1960 Polish co-production "The Silent Star," a lavishly budgeted adaptation of a Stanislaw Lem story, to the screaming camp of "In the Dust of the Stars." That film is a 1976 anti-imperialist tract set on a distant planet where leopard-print wallpaper and silver lamé boots are the latest fashion trends, and the local ruler is a sulky club kid who dyes his Caesar-cut blue and reclines voluptuously on lounge chairs. The third film is the thoughtful ["Eolomea"](#) (1972).

It's easy to condescend to these works, and indeed, "The Silent Star" was duly ridiculed on "Mystery Science Theater 3000" in its cut and dubbed form as ["First Spaceship on Venus."](#) But there is meat here for both the student of socialist iconography and the idle film aesthete - particularly in the surprisingly bright, solid hues of the Agfacolor process that the East Germans inherited from UFA (Universum-Film AG), the government film consortium that was taken over by the Nazis in the 1930's. DEFA, which likewise inherited Berlin's huge Babelsberg studio after the war, continued the UFA tradition of meticulous craftsmanship. Some effects shots suggest the matte images created for [Fritz Lang's "Metropolis"](#) (1926), and may well have been created by some of the same staff technicians, working for new masters 34 years later.

The transfers are not great, with the widescreen images presented letterboxed rather than spread out for widescreen televisions, and there is a general softness throughout. But given the rarity and fragility of this material, it's unrealistic to expect it to look as sleek and shiny as ["Star Wars."](#) The box retails for \$59.95; none of the features have been rated.