

The Twilight Zone

Unlocking the Door to A Television Classic

Martin Grams, Jr.

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INTRODUCTION

The year was 1959. Bill Veeck, head of a group that purchased a controlling interest in the Chicago White Sox, presented an unexpected specialty one afternoon in Comiskey Park. Little spacemen showed up to capture Luis Aparicio and Nellie Fox, proving that the bizarre and unexpected would be accepted by the crowd who cheered with amusement.

In the November 7, 1959 issue of *TV Guide*, Rod Serling commented, “Here’s what *The Twilight Zone* is: It’s an anthology series, half-hour in length, that delves into the odd, the bizarre, the unexpected. It probes into the dimension of imagination but with a concern for taste and for an adult audience too long considered to have I.Q.s in negative figures. *The Twilight Zone* is what it implies: that shadowy area of the almost-but-not-quite; the unbelievable told in terms that can be believed. Here’s what the program isn’t: It’s not a monster rally or a spook show. There will be nothing formula’d in it, nothing telegraphed, nothing so nostalgically familiar that an audience can usually join actors in duets.”

Writer George Clayton Johnson probably described *Twilight Zone* best when he referred to the series as “wisdom fiction.” In 1959, Rod Serling told Clarence E. Flick, supervisor of the *Radio-Television Curriculum* at San Jose State College, that the series was inspired and designed for that “willing suspension of disbelief.” For more than fifty years, *The Twilight Zone* has become an established landmark on the map of television history.

As a fan of the series, I read a lot of books and magazine articles about the program. I absorbed the wealth of information that came from those periodicals. Over the years, I purchased and collected a large number of papers related to Serling and *The Twilight Zone*, including production sheets, casting call sheets; internal correspondence, tax forms, contracts and many other sources I consider of value from private collectors and eBay. After reviewing the materials, I started to realize that many of the books and magazine articles were printing misinformation. One example was Marc Scott Zicree’s *The Twilight Zone Companion*, which had producer William Froug recall purchasing the French film, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” for \$10,000. The fact is, according to Cayuga’s financial papers, the film was purchased for \$20,000 plus an additional expense of almost \$5,000 for editing and sound sync fees. Worse, I began noticing how many books were consulting previous publications (rather than consulting studio and archival documents), resulting in the reprint of the same misinformation.

While every book about Rod Serling or *The Twilight Zone* has offered something new and fresh, whether it be unpublished *Zone* scripts or exclusive interviews with cast and crew, I never found any book that did not have some major error within the pages. It is a known fact that no book ever published is flawless, so stating corrections to previously published material is important as preserving the 35mm nitrate films housed at CBS.

The origin of this tome began four years ago when I submitted an article for a film magazine that corrected many of the errors that I had observed in other books, and citing the sources for these corrections. Someone representing the magazine sent me a rejection. I later discovered that one of the members of magazine's staff had written a book about *The Twilight Zone* and without knowing it beforehand, was citing a mistake from their own effort.

My next option? Write a book. Document the series with as many facts as I could glean from the materials and whenever possible, correct the errors that continue to be reprinted in other books. And this is what you hold in your hands. Every bit of information within the pages of his book originated from "reliable" materials in my personal archive. For the reasons stated above, I decided it would be unwise to consult previously published books on Rod Serling or *The Twilight Zone*. As a friend of mine once told me, "just because it's found in four different books does not make it a fact."

It is important to note that this book is about *The Twilight Zone* and not a biography about Rod Serling. Some publications have blended both themes, discussing personal opinions as fact when describing another person's thoughts or feelings. I have avoided this technique. Any statements alluded to Serling, such as "Serling felt comfortable," are not opinions based on my own interpretation of the research material. They are based on facts, such as a letter from Serling to a friend, expressing the very words that he "felt comfortable."

This book is not meant to offer a critical analysis of the episodes, nor approach the psychological aspect of fictional characters and how they were portrayed on screen. There is no exploration of Freudian terms or suggested sexual overtones, unless it involved a documented censorship issue. This book will not question the science and physics within the content of the episodes. Why did I choose to avoid this? Because Serling specifically asked the viewers to suspend disbelief in order to enjoy the stories and the morals they were designed to elucidate.

If there is a moral to be learned from watching an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, it comes across when viewed at home. There will be some information and trivia that fans of the program will find repetitive. This is unavoidable – especially since, at this late date, there have been a number of books and magazine articles about Rod Serling and *The Twilight Zone*. What I can assure you is that to the best of my ability, it is complete, accurate, and extensive. I consulted no books or websites for the sake of maintaining the accuracy of the contents in this book. Every piece of information in this book can be backed up and in most cases, verified using more than one reliable source.

As I was completing the rough draft of the book, I sought out help from a few "authorities" on *The Twilight Zone* that came recommended to me by word-of-mouth, in the hopes that they would lend a guiding hand. Instead, I received opposition in both verbal and written form: If Rod Serling was alive today, I am sure he would have been disappointed to learn that some people have taken a hobby and turned it into a religion. Along the way, however, I met another soul who had the same intentions as I, and he, too, received similar opposition. To finish the project, it soon became apparent that I should consult only close friends who I have known for years. They made suggestions, offered advice and they are without a doubt the best friends I could ever ask for.

With this in mind, I would like to thank many individuals who contributed to this book. In no particular order: Donald Ramlow, for his suggestions and review; Jim Widner, for his knowledge in all things science fiction; Ben Ohmart for his friendship and putting me in touch with many actors; June Foray; Roger Davis; Mariette Hartley; Michael Berger; R.R. King; William Allendorfer; Brooke Hayward; Roy Bright, for his guidance and friendship; Warren Stevens; Jack French; Jacqueline Scott; Jen and Ken Stockinger; Cliff Robertson; Natalie Trundy; Patricia Breslin; Patricia Crowley; Tom Reese; Ruta Lee; Margarita Cordiva; Gail Kobe; Noah Keen; Marvin H. Petal; John Crawford; John Tomerlin; Walter E. Grauman; Russell Johnson; Orson Bean; Joseph Ruskin; Barbara Stuart; Jimmy Lydon; Josip Elic; Derek Tague, who assisted me at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, at Lincoln Center, Billy Rose Theater Collection; Lois Nettleton; Bob Cockrum; Clorinda Thompson; David Macklin; Virginia Trimble; Patrick Lucanio; Peter Mark Richman; James Callahan; Earl Hamner, Jr.; Professor John Furia, Jr., B.A.; Bill Jaker, Theodore Bikel; Ned Comstock; Paul Comi; Bill Sasser; Larry Floyd; Michelle Katherine; Gene Blottner; Richard Devon; H.W. Wynant; Kenneth Field; Karl Schadow; Rodney Bowcock; Mickey Rooney; Carol Summers and Jim Rosen, who put me in touch with many of the actors and directors from the television series; Jim Sheldon; Joanne Linville; Bill Seabrook; Scott Brogan; Bill Abbott; Bob Klein; James Best; Mike Tiefenbacher and Scott Shaw for helping assist me with the comic books; Wright King; Robert Redford; Nico Minardos; John Dunning; Mike Korologos; Marvin Petal; Jonathan Winters; Richard Fry; Rick Keating; Anne Francis; Charlie Summers and the OTR Digest; William Windom; Bill Mumy; Arlene Osborne; Martin Landau; Morgan Brittany; Joseph Ruskin; Laurie Jacobson; Jean Carson; Steve Kostelecky; Jack Klugman; Chuck Hicks; Richard Donner; Shelley Berman; Nancy Malone; Barry Nelson; George Takei; Jack Grinnage; Curt Phillips; Del Reisman; Buck Houghton; Suzanne Lloyd; Kermyt Anderson; Tim Matheson; Paul Adomites; Susan Gordon; George Grizzard; Scott Livingston; Henri Lanoë; the staff at Lazy River Books; W. Gary Wetstein; Dara Hoffman; Jonathan Harris; Ted Post; Richard Erdman; Antoinette Bower; Bill Idelson; Mary Wood for sharing a few of the letters and telegrams she collected over the years; Jeff Pirtle and LeeAnn Platner of NBC Universal; Seth T. Smolinske; George Barris; Joji A. Barris; Barry Hoffman; Richard L. Bare; Earl Holliman; Beverly Garland; Kevin McCarthy; Orson Bean; and Joyce Van Patten.

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Photos in this book were provided by a number of individuals: of actors, writers and directors who were involved with the actual productions and were kind enough to mail me the photos from their personal collection. I also want to thank Darlene K. Swanson and Dan Swanson of Van-garde Imagery, Inc. for the hard work they put into each page of the book.

The one person I am most indebted to is Terry Salomonson. I met Terry along the well-traveled road and he spent countless hours assisting me in the research for this book. He offered suggestions, double checked facts by reviewing various prints of the television episodes, and drove a ton of Serling memorabilia from a private collector's archive to my house. My wife likes to say that our house is God's house. Terry's Michigan-based generosity not only earned him a key to our front door, but to our hearts as well.

Any hobby, whether it be collecting stamps, collecting old-time radio shows or viewing *The Twilight Zone*, lends itself a form of gratitude to the fan clubs, newsletters, websites and books published on the subject. Without these, any hobby would diminish in size. There have been a bazillion books written on *The Twilight Zone* already, and there will probably be a bazillion more. Each one contributes something of importance to those who appreciate the program, and it is my hope that this book augments these contributions.

Regarding the subject of contributions . . . this book was a labor of love for me. I never wrote it for the purpose of name glory or financial profit. With this in mind, I have arranged with the publishers to donate my royalties (the standard percentage of net profits for any author) to the Johns Hopkins Comprehensive Cancer Center. Some people dismiss cancer as a six-letter word, until they observe a friend or family relative suffering from the disease. Johns Hopkins is a leading contributor to the fight and prevention of cancer. Through this arrangement, the book will contribute much more than a few pages of text.

If I may close on a positive note, this marks my 17th successfully published book. Every book has been a learning experience and with the completion of each project, I realize I made new friends. *The Twilight Zone* is no exception. For everyone who helped me along, I offer my sincere appreciation.

Now let us travel down that road toward the signpost up ahead . . .

Martin Grams Jr.
August 2007

CHAPTER ONE

Dr. Christian Meets Rod Serling

While many maintain that *The Twilight Zone* influenced a great number of authors, television producers, scriptwriters and fans in general, the television program was influenced by the standards of the broadcast networks. Rod Serling worked first in radio and then moved on to television in Cincinnati (teaching himself, through actual writing, whatever he learned of playwriting). Wanting to make a profession of writing, he was at the radio's speaker, often favoring good dramas and programs of serious horror and science fiction. Shows such as *Suspense* and *The Mysterious Traveler* may well have been influences for the types of stories of which he grew fond.

One of Serling's earliest jobs was as an unsalaried volunteer writer and actor with WNYC, a New York City radio station. Later he worked for stations in Marion and Springfield, Ohio, as well as his native Binghamton, N.Y., and Cincinnati.

"In 1946, I started writing for radio at a New York City station and thereafter did radio writing at other small stations," he recalled. "It was experience, but incidental experience. I learned 'time,' writing for a medium that is measured in seconds. Radio and its offspring, television, are unique in the stringency of the time factor. Radio and TV stations gave me a look-see at the factory that would produce my product. I got to understand the basic workings of cameras, lights and microphones. I got a sense of the space that could be utilized and the number of people who might be accommodated in that space. This was all to the good."

The radio programs Serling wrote for, however, were not broadcast nationally on a coast-to-coast hookup. They were not sponsored. In fact, almost all of them were sustained, that is, the production costs were borne by the network rather than a sponsor. Cheap to produce, these programs required no major film stars to pay, and there was no shortage of radio actors willing to work for union scale. For him, this was experience needed for a writer with no credits to his name, to get his foot in the door for programs that paid much more – courtesy of well-heeled sponsors willing to pick up the tab.

The Chesebrough Manufacturing Company, for example, sponsored a long-running radio program titled *Dr. Christian*. The program featured top-quality dramas of a country doctor who applied the Golden Rule approach to life when facing obstacles that required his inner strength for support.

In the beginning, the *Dr. Christian* radio program came from various scriptwriters, among them Ruth Adams Knight. In 1942, the producers tried a new approach: a contest in which listeners could

submit scripts and be eligible for large cash prizes. This may have been the most significant factor in the program's long 17-year history. Suddenly, everyone in the country was a scriptwriter. Weekly awards ranged from \$150 to \$500, good money in 1942, and the grand prize won the author \$2,000. It soon became *The Vaseline Program*, "the only show in radio where the audience writes the script." *Newsweek* reported that 7,697 scripts were received in 1947; sometimes that number went as high as 10,000. Many were called, however, but few were chosen.

The scripts that made it to the air continued the appeal of traditional values, showing Dr. Christian as the symbol of good will, as a philanthropist and an unabashed Cupid. The subject matter would include anything – even fantasy. One show was about a mermaid; on another, a human-like jalopy named Betsy fell in love with a black Packard owned by a woman chief of police. Only when murder was the theme of a script did listeners complain; they liked the show when it was mellow. The 1947 prize play concerned Dr. Christian's effort to convince an unborn child that Earth was not so bad after all.

At Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, Rod Serling majored in language and literature and began writing scripts for radio. He became manager of the Antioch Broadcasting System's radio workshop where he wrote, directed and acted in weekly full-scale radio productions broadcast over WJEM, Springfield. With confidence on his shoulder, during the 1948-49 school year, the entire output of the workshop was written by Serling. With the exception of one adaptation, all of the radio scripts were entirely original. Later he would look back and call this work some "pretty bad stuff."

For the broadcast of May 18, 1949, the eighth annual scriptwriting contest of *Dr. Christian* ended with a special broadcast revealing the year's winners. Among the guests on that particular program was Rod Serling, who at the time was attending Antioch College. The producers of the radio show even paid him \$76.56 to reimburse his expenses in getting to CBS in New York City to appear on the *Dr. Christian* program. His submission, titled "To Live a Dream," had won approval of the judges and been accepted by producer Dorothy McCann. Serling's script helped him place in the radio contest that netted him a \$500 award.

Serling brought along his wife, Carol, to attend the radio broadcast. Among the cast on stage were star Jean Hersholt, Helen Claire as nurse Judy Price, and prizewinners Russell F. Johnson, Maree Dow Gagne, Mrs. Aida Cromwell, Miss Terry McCoog, Earl Hamner, Jr. and Mrs. Halle Truitt Yenni. The program, still sponsored by Chesebrough, was the 546th broadcast of the series. Russell F. Johnson of Thomaston, Connecticut won the \$2,000 first prize for his script titled, "Stolen Glory." Mrs. Lillian Kerr of Tillamook, Oregon, won \$500 for her script titled, "Angel with a Black Eye." Earl Hamner, Jr. of Cincinnati, Ohio (the same Hamner who would later write scripts for *The Twilight Zone*), won \$500 for his script titled "All Things Come Home." This was not Hamner's first time winning the contest. He had been on the show previous for his award-winning scripts, "Now That Spring is There" and "Who Would Not Sing for David?"

One by one, the prizewinners were announced and interviewed on stage. Biographical background, professional endeavors and their writing ambitions were discussed. Halfway through the broadcast, Rod Serling came to the microphone.

HERSHOLT: *Hello, Rod . . . and congratulations. I read your winning script, "To Live a Dream," and I thought it was a fine job of writing.*

SERLING: *Thank you, Mr. Hersholt. You've no idea how thrilled I am to know that you and the judges selected my script as one of the winners.*

- HERSHOLT:** *Now tell us a little about yourself, Rod.*
- SERLING:** *Well . . . I first saw the light of day in Syracuse, New York, graduated from Binghamton High School, at Binghamton, New York . . . And am now in my third year of college at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio.*
- HERSHOLT:** *You covered an awful lot of years in an awfully few words. What happened during all that time?*
- SERLING:** *Well . . . before the war I did some staff work at a Binghamton radio station . . . tried to write . . . but never had anything published.*
- HERSHOLT:** *And during the war?*
- SERLING:** *I was in the same place as Russell Johnson . . . the Pacific . . . with the Army.*
- HERSHOLT:** *What did you do in the Army?*
- SERLING:** *I was a paratrooper.*
- HERSHOLT:** *Where did you get the idea for this fine story you wrote?*
- SERLING:** *Well . . . I've always been fond of boxing . . . tried my hand in the Golden Gloves. And well . . . since you've read my story, you know where it all ties in.*
- HERSHOLT:** *Indeed I do. And do you intend to follow writing as a profession?*
- SERLING:** *I'd like to, Mr. Hersholt. In fact, the ambition of my wife and I . . .*
- HERSHOLT:** *Oh . . . another married man!*
- SERLING:** *How did Russell Johnson say it? Yes, sir!*
- HERSHOLT:** *And is your wife sitting out front, too?*
- SERLING:** *Yes, sir . . . right there.*
- HERSHOLT:** *Well, let's have her stand up and take a bow, too . . . Mrs. Rod Serling . . .*
(Applause)
- HERSHOLT:** *Well, well, you ex-G.I.s certainly specialize in beautiful brides. And now, back to that ambition of yours.*
- SERLING:** *Well, we want to live in a large house, in the suburb of a large city, raise a family, a lot of dogs . . . and write!*
- HERSHOLT:** *And I certainly hope you realize such a fine American ambition, Mr. Serling. Maybe this check for five hundred dollars will go toward part of the down payment on that dream! Congratulations . . . and good luck to you!*
- SERLING:** *Thank you, Mr. Hersholt.*

The Radio Scripts

Serling's success earned him a credit that would gain the attention of other radio producers, when he included a cover letter with a submission. Broadcasting standards during the 1940s were much different from the standards enforced by the late 1950s. The policy of reviewing and accepting unsolicited radio scripts and plot proposals varied from one producer to the next. While many programs had a staff of writers, other programs occasionally purchased submissions from the open market. *Suspense*, a radio anthology specializing in thrilling crime dramas, for example, bought scripts from a deaf mute in Brooklyn, a night watchman from Chicago, a cowhand in Wyoming, and one script from a former inmate of San Quentin.

By the 1950s, however, a few who submitted plot proposals and scripts were seeking vengeance for their rejected submissions. They filed lawsuits against the producers and the networks whenever they heard a program of similar nature, claiming their ideas were "stolen" without due compensation. The networks began enforcing policies, in agreement with radio and television producers, not to review or accept any outside submissions. For scriptwriters offering their work in the hopes of making a sale it became a bit more complicated.

The success of the *Dr. Christian* radio script led to multiple attempts on Serling's part to submit more proposals to other coast-to-coast radio programs.

"I just kept on," he recalled years later to a newspaper columnist. "I had to earn a living and took a staff writing job on a Cincinnati radio station; but during every spare moment I turned out more free-lance scripts. Finally, I sold three others, but for each play accepted there were at least three or more turned down."

With success came the eventual edge of defeat. On September 8, 1949, Serling's radio script "Potter's Paradise" was rejected by the advertising agency, Wallace-Ferry-Hanly Company, for the *First Nighter Program*. Ira L. Avery, producer for Armstrong's *Theatre of Today*, rejected his script "The Memory" in October, because "in the handling of familiar plots and themes, selection needs to be placed on a level determined by the volume and quality of submissions. We regret that, in the light of heavy competition, we do not find this story suited to our current needs."

After peddling a football script titled "Cupid at Left Half" to *Curtain Time* and finding that script rejected, he wrote to Myron Golden, script editor of the radio program, to ask why he had failed to sell a single script to *Curtain Time*. On October 10, 1949, he sent the following candid reply: "This particular script lacks a professional quality. The dialog is spotty, the plot is loose, and the whole thing lacks verisimilitude . . . It appears to be a standard plot that writers somehow or other manage to pluck out of the public domain."*

On August 10, 1949, producer/director Martin Horrell of *Grand Central Station* rejected Serling's prizefight script titled "Winner Take Nothing." The script was "better than average" Horrell admitted, but the ladies who listened to his program on Saturday afternoons "have told us in no uncertain terms that prize fight stories aren't what they like most." In a letter, Horrell offered him what may have been the best advice given to the young Ohio resident. "I have a feeling that the script

*Two of Serling's earliest attempts to sell scripts to a national radio program are evident in "Look to the Sky," dated July 13, 1947, and "The Most Dangerous Game," dated June 22, 1947. The latter script was adapted from the Richard Connell short story of the same name.

would be far better for sight than for sound only, because in any radio presentation, the fights are not seen. Perhaps this is a baby you should try on some of the producers of television shows.”

“Those were discouraging, frustrating years,” he told a columnist in early 1960. “I wanted to quit many times. But there was something within me that made me go on. I continued writing and submitting scripts without pay and, what is even worse, most of the time, without recognition. Then at last I came up with two plays that were bought by the old *Grand Central Station* series on CBS Radio. I thought that now surely I was in. But I wasn’t. Day after day, I continued to pound the typewriter, with no result.”

Grand Central Station was a radio anthology consisting of light comedies and fluffy romance. Serling’s first sale to the program was “The Local is a Very Slow Train.” Broadcast on September 10, 1949, under the new title of “Hop Off the Express and Grab a Local,” the story concerned two young men, Joey and Steve, who became involved in a murder case while trying to escape the slums of the city where they live. His second sale for the series was “The Welcome Home,” broadcast on December 31, 1949, and concerned the story of Bill Grant, a crusading reporter for the fictional New York *Globe*.

While his first sale was the prize-winning *Dr. Christian* script, the first script to be dramatized nationally on radio was the September 10, 1949 broadcast of *Grand Central Station*. In early November, his luck hung on long enough for him to receive a letter from Rita Franklin of the *Dr. Christian* program, alerting him that his prize-winning “To Live a Dream,” would finally be broadcast on December 7, 1949. Scheduling conflicts pushed the script ahead a week to November 30, 1949, and Rod Serling’s name was once again referenced on the *Dr. Christian* radio program.*

Serling began working at radio stations such as WJEL in Springfield, Ohio, and WMRN in Marion, Ohio. Months later, in the spring of 1950, he graduated from college, and his first job was at WLW in Cincinnati, the Crosley Broadcasting Corporation’s flagship station. The college radio work had paid \$45 to \$50 a week, but WLW was offering \$75 weekly and the young playwright accepted the job. Members of the program’s casts were students of the radio department at the College of Music in Cincinnati, and he often found himself playing a role or two for some of the broadcasts. It should be noted that among the leaders of the entertainment industry who began their careers at WLW were Rosemary Clooney, Betty Clooney, Red Skelton, Red Barber, Jane Froman, The Mills Brothers, Virginia Payne, Doris Day, Durward Kirby, Eddie Albert, and Janette Davis.**

Sometime in 1950 or 1951, Serling sold Crosley a number of scripts for dramatization on both radio and television. It is not clear whether the dramas made it to the airwaves, but he did revise the scripts slightly and sold them to various television anthologies. Among the scripts were “Grady Everett for the People,” “Law Nine Concerning Christmas,” “The Sands of Tom,” “The Time Element,”

* Serling later submitted a second script to the *Dr. Christian* radio program that was originally titled “The Power of Abner Doubleday” (for reasons unknown the title changed to “The Power of Willie Doubleday”) but failed to make the sale.

** The Crosley Broadcasting Corporation, founded by radio manufacturing pioneer Powel Crosley, Jr., was an early operator of radio stations in the U.S. During World War II, it operated as many as five shortwave stations, using the call signs WLWK, WLWL, WLWO, WLWR and WLWS. In 1945, the Crosley interests were purchased by the Aviation Corporation. The radio and appliance manufacturing arm changed its name to Avco, but the broadcast operations continued to operate under the Crosley name. From the 1950s through the 1970s, Crosley (or Avco) operated a small television network in which programs were produced at one of its stations and broadcast on the other Crosley stations in the Midwest, and occasionally by non-Crosley stations.