

A collage of vintage audio equipment. In the background is a large, ornate wooden jukebox with a coin slot and several buttons. In the foreground, there are several pieces of audio gear: a portable radio with a green and gold body and a mesh grille; a boombox with a wooden top and a digital display; a vintage car radio with a circular gauge and a speaker grille; and a small electronic circuit board with a red LED light. The overall aesthetic is retro and nostalgic.

The Drink Tank 424 Audio Dramas

Table of Contents

Page 3—Audio Dramas: An Editorial

by Christopher J. Garcia; Art from Kathryn Duval

Page 5—The Witch’s Tale

by España Sheriff

Page 7—Yes, You CAN Listen to Old-Time Radio

by Christopher J. Garcia; Art from Kathryn Duval

Page 10—Lord of the Rings: The BBC Radio Series

by Julian West

Page 13—A Universe of Audible Originals

by Christopher J. Garcia

Page 18—Roger Gregg, Crazy Dog Audio Theatre, and Me

by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

Page 22—Indy Audio Dramas Worth Your Time

by Christopher J. Garcia

Page 24—“Organs Hanging”: The Inside-Out Story of a Classic Radio Horror

by Helena Nash

Page 27—Stephen Colbert Reads “The Veldt” on Selected Shorts

by Christopher J. Garcia

Page 30—Power Records: The Action Comes Alive!

by Chuck Serface

Audio Dramas: An Editorial

by Christopher J. Garcia

I've told this story before. When I was a kid, I liked to get myself into small spaces. We had a set of built-in shelves that I would climb into, dragging a blanket with me, and once there I would just hang out. As I got a little older, seven- or eight-years old maybe, I would bring my Fisher-Price tape recorder with me. I had a few tapes, including Weird Al's *In 3D*, but mostly I would bring a blank tape in and tell stories into it. These were my first podcasts, and since I wasn't that good a reader at the point, the stories I told tended to be originals -- probably terrible, I don't know since I no longer have any of them, but they were my stories.

I've always loved audio dramas. One Christmas, we got my Gramma a set of tapes of old-time radio shows that included *Our Miss Brooks*, *The Jack Benny Program*, *Burns & Allen*, and *The Mercury Theatre on the Air*. I heard so many of them, and I especially loved *War of the Worlds*, which was magical to a kid like me. During college, a few audio dramas of comic storylines hit the streets, most notably *Knightfall*. I loved it, and I listened the hell out of it. And as the Internet took over the world, those old radio shows started to pop up. Every existing episode of *The Mercury Theatre* is up there, and you could listen to *X Minus One* or *Dimension X*. These caught my attention, and I was known to listen to them while working.

Then we got podcasts. I was in heaven. I still am.

It's been a long time since I've been home. The fires that drove us out are controlled, but still hot spots keep popping up. Most folks are home, but we're waiting for the cleaning to make our house inhabitable. It should be a few weeks. The boys are doing okay, though Benji is acting out.

He misses home, he doesn't like school. Go figure.

I've been lucky enough to work on various things, most notably my new podcast, my art pieces, a little more cooking. I haven't gotten to watch much, and my podcast listening was slightly limited for this issue's focus on the Audio Drama. So it goes.

Not sure what the next issue is gonna be yet, but the end of the year (other than the *Journey Planet* dedicated to King Arthur!) is gonna be on Sondheim. I'm finally going to get to write about *Company*, and *Sweeney Todd*, and *Sunday in the Park with George*, and most importantly, *Follies*. I can't wait!

I love you guys. I just wanna say that. Everything that's been going on and y'all have all been amazing, coming out to help, giving where you could, and most importantly, just sticking around. Y'all are the best, always.



Stories of Gothic Horror from the Golden Age of Radio

The Witch's Tale



by Alonzo Deen Cole

The Witch's Tale by España Sheriff

Before

there were television horror hosts, and before there was EC Comics, there was old-time-radio horror; full of wonderfully over the top hosts with stage-trained voices that eased you into a chilling tale every week. One of the very earliest of these, quite possibly the first of them all, was Old Nancy, the Witch of Salem!

Starting in May 1931 and running until 1939 *The Witch's Tale* was an anthology horror series created, written, and directed by Alonzo Deen Cole and featuring what as far as I can tell is rather a rarity in OTR horror: a female host.

Initially Old Nancy was played by Adelaide Fitz-Allen, a veteran stage actress who, while not quite as ancient as Old Nancy was supposed to be, was seventy-nine when she sadly passed away in 1935, a few years into the run of the show. Her replacement was child actress Miriam Wolfe, just thirteen-years old at the time. Wolfe's excellent witchy cackle entertained audiences until eventually she left the role to pursue a successful radio and later television voice-acting career. For the final years of the show's run Old Nancy would be voiced by future Disney voice actress Martha Wentworth.



Like many old-time-radio shows, most of recordings are no longer available, apparently Cole himself destroyed them in the sixties, thinking them of no value. Various OTR websites host the remaining ones, and as I listened - more or less randomly at first - I tried to guess which Old Nancy I was hearing. The difference in the voices is there, for sure, but they're all good witches in their own way. I checked the dates as I guessed and soon discovered that the answer isn't simple. *The Witch's Tale* was broadcast live, and sometimes scripts were reused years later with a different actress, but on top of that the show was later picked up in Australia with a whole different cast, running 1938-1943 and not even the OTR detectives seem to know the name if the Australian Old Nancy.

Each show starts with a narrator inviting you to join Old Nancy and Satan, her wise black cat. In the US version he does so to thrilling violins promising chills, and in the Australian version with a tolling bell and the sound of wailing wings. In both, Old Nancy cackles and then Satan yowls. Now, Satan is played by Cole himself in the US version, and although a solid enough actor I'm sure (he appeared in various roles on the show) he is not a convincing cat in the least. The Australian cat is far more convincingly feline.

Somehow it is always old Nancy's birthday, and she proudly announces her ages: "A hunnert and fiteen year old today I be, yes a hunnert and fiteen!" It is always a number between 100 and 120, in no particular order. She invites us to lower the lights, draw up to the fire, and gaze into the embers as she draws us a picture of the setting. Satan occasionally pipes up with a conversational "miaow." A few of the shows are two-parters, allegedly in these cases it was because of the vagaries of live broadcasting. Cole would rewrite on the spot if it looked like they weren't going to get to the end in time, and voilà! Two-parter!

The remaining episodes are pretty solid, some originals by Cole which are suitably creepy even if not particularly groundbreaking, and some adaptations of classics like Frankenstein. There are even some familiar names in the casts, notably Agnes Moorehead shows up to class up the joint in an adaptation of Robert Lewis Stevenson's *The Bottle Imp*.

The Witch's Tale was popular and seems to have set the mold for later shows, but Cole was unable to spin it off into other mediums. He tried publishing a magazine based on it but only got two issues out, and in the 1950s there was talk of a television adaptation which was never produced. Still, he went on to write for many radio shows, including hundreds of scripts for the popular *Casey, Crime Photographer*. He even had a couple of short stories in *Weird Tales* during the early 1940s.

THE WITCH'S TALE

RADIO MASTERPIECE OF MYSTERY
 STARRING ALONZO DEEN COLE, CREATOR
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 1775 BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY



Yes, You CAN Listen to Old-Time Radio by Christopher J. Garcia

Nothing is gone if it was recorded. That's the current theory. Today, so much material from the olden days of radio is still out there, circulating on the Internet like garbage in the middle of the Pacific. There are a few different places to find them, and it's actually a little difficult to find specific great stuff, and some of the best stuff is exactly what you would think it is.

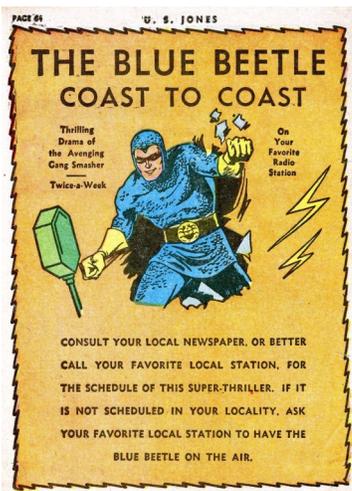
I. [The Mercury Theatre](#)

Go here and download everything. EVERYTHING!

This material is some of the most important of all the old-time radio that survives. Orson Welles was a genius, and the way these were put together make them some of the most impressive not only of the time, but to this day. *The War of the Worlds* episode is legendary, of course, but it's far from the best, though it's certainly the one that worked with the material in the most fascinating way. The episodes that adapt *The Pickwick Papers*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Around the World in 80 Days* are all phenomenal with incredible voice acting that is of the 1930s.

It was eventually renamed *The Campbell Playhouse*, after Campbell Soup became a sponsor, and it was just as good. The episodes on *The Magnificent Ambersons* are fantastic and shows why *Ambersons* is Welles' masterpiece. The cast for these, including the legendary Agnes Moorehead and Joseph Cotten, deserves a Nobel Prize!

The bonus material on *The Mercury Theatre* site is also worth a listen. *Les Misérables* as a seven-part story is great, as is the interview Welles does with H.G. Wells. There's also an interview that Leonard Maltin did with the remaining *Mercury Theatre* folks in 1988 that's fantastic.



2. [The Blue Beetle](#)

Superman and Batman were both bigger, but the Blue Beetle deserves much more love!

Blue Beetle's radio show didn't even run a full year, and it was much more simplistic than other superhero shows. It's an impressive show for listeners of 2020 to give an ear to. It's all the things we associate with pre-2000 comic book movies, only audio. The sound design is good, the voice acting in early episodes is solid, but it's also obvious that they lost interest in the show and stopped putting money behind it, so it gets worse as time goes by. No matter. It's still a lot of fun.

3. [A Canticle for Leibowitz](#)

Okay, this barely counts as old timey, but it's great.

Arguably the most perfect science-fiction novel ever written, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was turned into an audio drama in 1980 by NPR. It's good, damn good, and actually manages to do the source material proud while utilizing the medium well. I thought it was a really good way to play with everything, and I say it qualifies as it's forty-years old now! The best part is that that it makes you feel like you've read the book! It's damn-near a *Cliff Notes*!

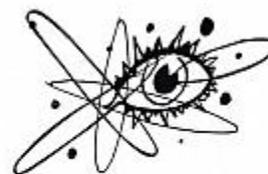
4. [X-Minus One](#)

Do not pass this up!

The 1950s series of radio dramas really brings it all home. Here, so many of the most important science-fiction stories of all time, like "The Veldt," "There Will Come Soft Rains," "The Cold Equations," "A Logic Named Joe," and "Marionettes, Inc." These are just the tip of the iceberg, and the entire series is worth listening to. My fave? "The Sense of Wonder," which might be the most impressively prescient story about the way the world has forgotten its path almost purposely.

As a series, it's incredible, and an excellent document of the field at the time, largely due to the connection with *Galaxy Magazine*, I imagine. There is a larger than you'd expect emphasis on character in these, which is impressive. The 1950s were an important time in the genre, and I think this show was a bit part of that.

"X MINUS ONE" =



ESCAPE

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5. [Lux Radio Theatre:](#)

If you want to hear the big names of the 1930s through 1950s doing radio stuff, this is the show. There's a LOT of this out there, and it's all over the place with a ton of them on *Internet Archive*. The thing about these are they are designed to be vehicles for the star as opposed to the stars being there to bring life to the stories. That's not to say that the stories aren't great, some of them are, but really, you're there to hear your Claudette Colberts, your Vivian Leighs, and your Jimmy Stewarts.

Honestly, *British Agent* alone is worth downloading the entire series. It's a great episode featuring

Clark Gable and Frances Farmer, may her troubled spirit rest in peace, and it's followed by the announcement of the death of Jean Harlowe, who had died earlier in the day. There are many others that are worth listening to, but that one sticks out. You can find so many of them out there.

6. *The Complete Day of Recording Sept. 21, 1939*: <https://archive.org/details/CompleteBroadcastDay>

I never really appreciated what radio was like in the 1930s until I heard this.

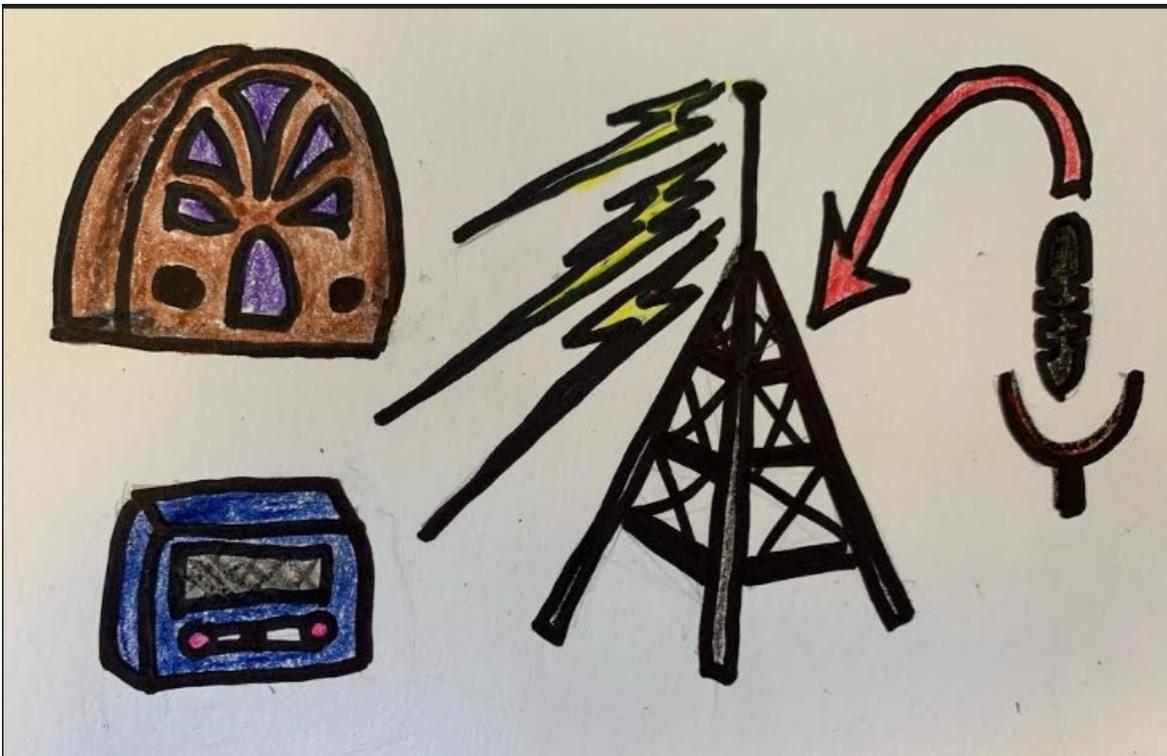
This is the entire broadcast day on September 21st, 1939. Everything. It was recorded by the engineers, and it weren't an easy thing, either! There are a lot of radio dramas and comedies, but there's also a baseball game, news, commercials, and more. There's an address by Roosevelt, and an excellent audio documentary series called *Americans at Work* that is fascinating! There's a bunch of great music, including the Louis Prima Orchestra. It's strange it took me so long to make me realize that the television format I grew up with is basically a natural outgrowth of what they were doing on radio. This is an amazing time capsule, and the National Recording Registry, Cooperstown for American audio recordings, honored it a few years back.

7. *Whitehall 1212*: https://archive.org/details/WhiteHall_1212

True Crime is not new.

This series is drawn from the films of Scotland Yard's Black Museum. It's British true stories, made for the US audience. They are some of the classics, like the murder of Charles Brooks and the Anne Battersby case, but they are told from the police's point of view. In that way, they're closer related to *Dragnet* than *Unsolved Mysteries*. The entire series influenced a generation of writers, and there's no doubt that Truman Capote was a listener because you can see its fingerprints all over *In Cold Blood*.

You can find a lot more out there, Archive.org is a great resource, as is YouTube, and Audible has many as well.





Lord of the Rings: The BBC Radio Series **by Julian West**

When I was a child, we didn't have a television. This seemed quite normal to me – though I deeply felt the lack of *Doctor Who* in my life. In the absence of TV, I listened to a lot of radio. Not much music but a lot of talk shows, comedy, sport and drama. BBC radio produced a lot of original drama, adaptations of classic works, and serials. I listened to a lot of it.

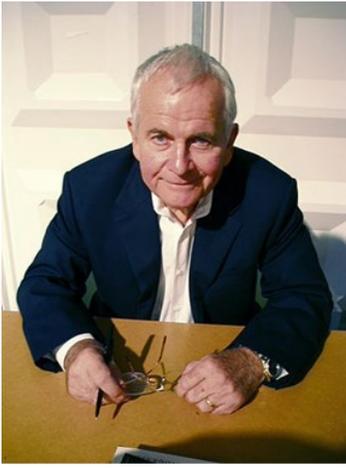
At the same time, I was reading a lot of SF and the associated genres. I had a succession of favorites: Asimov, Lovecraft, Aldiss, and all the others. And then, with no great expectations, I began *Lord of the Rings*. I reacted much as many other people did. I felt as if the book had been written to fulfill my own special needs. I hoarded a library copy of *Return of the King* in order to pore over the appendices. I acquired my own single-volume paperback copy, which I still possess, clearly read multiple times.

It seemed to me impossible that there would ever be a *Lord of the Rings* film or TV series. It would be an absurdity. It wasn't even worth thinking about. To some extent, I think I was right. However, a radio adaptation was something that could be envisioned. Radio is cheap. It's not as cheap as a paperback book to manufacture, but it's a lot less expensive than all those visual special effects.

When the BBC announced their adaptation in Spring of 1981, it was nevertheless completely unexpected. I'd read *LOTR* several times by then, and it was a book I'd become completely familiar with. I wasn't sure how I would feel about a radio adaptation. However, I had no choice. It was going to be a serious undertaking.

To clarify just how serious, there would be 26 half-hour episodes. This entailed buying thirteen C-60 cassette tapes. Every Sunday at noon, I had to tune in BBC Radio 4, attach the cassette deck, and press record when the theme tune started. Twenty-six times. And I got all of them. If I missed an episode, I had one more shot on Wednesday night at ten.

It's the kind of obsessive behaviour that young people can indulge in. And it was well worth it, because I still have those tapes, and have played them many times since. I've also acquired, when it became available, the retail version (so piracy issues don't arise).



And how good was it? Is it something worth seeking out, when we have Peter Jackson's impressive film? When you can read the books whenever you want?

I can't speak for anyone else, but I have a particular affection for this adaptation, which I think does something that only audio can do. There's a particular intimacy to just listening to something. The most perfect film will always be something at a distance. You see something on the cinema screen, or on a TV, or on a phone, and it's over *there*. But audio is right inside your head.

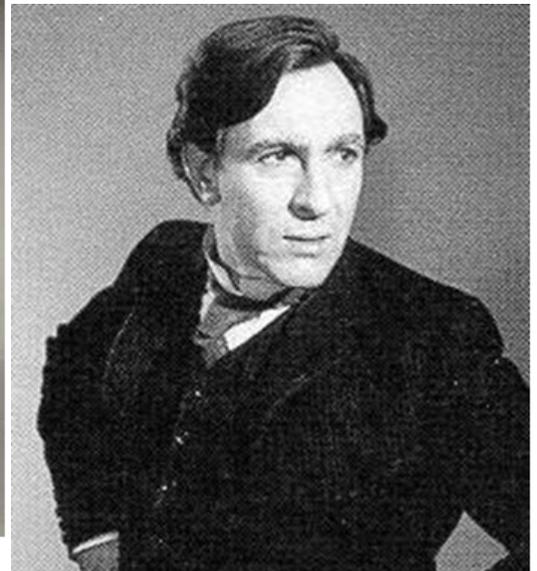
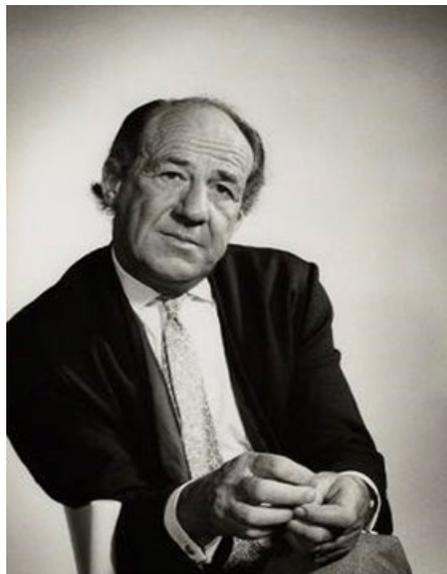
Firstly, it's long. The BBC version is longer than Jackson's film, if only by a couple of hours. But it should be remembered that while the films are bursting at the seams with battle scenes and chases, you can't really do that on radio. The fights and battles in this version are suggested, not shown. And what fills the gap is dialogue. Actual Tolkien dialogue, between characters.

How's the acting? Let's have a look at the cast. Frodo is Ian Holm. Ash from *Alien*, and many other films and TV series. He's most notably Bilbo in the Jackson films. He's younger here, but still a mature actor, and he takes on the most demanding role in the story very comfortably.

He's partnered by Bill Nighy as Sam. Nighy has become a very well-known actor since this time. He was almost unknown then. He conveys Sam's innocence, in a way that gives room for him to show his strength later on as he meets and overcomes his challenges.



John Le Mesurier is Bilbo. He does a wonderful job. Michael Hordern is Gandalf. They're of an earlier generation. They both appear through dozens of black-and-white films, portraying confused civil servants trying to deal with situations getting out of control. One would not have expected them to be so comfortable in Middle-Earth, but they seem born to it. Together, introducing the story and introducing Frodo and Sam, they set the pace. This is not a frenetic adaptation. This is relaxed. It's going to take its time to get where it's going, and there will be a slow build.



When Robert Stephens arrives as Aragorn, the main characters are set. Although not much remembered now, in his day Stephens was considered the heir to Olivier. This never came about, and by 1981, he had suffered a number of frustrations and problems, both in his career and his personal life. He gives us a middle-aged, slightly bitter Aragorn, with a hint of danger.

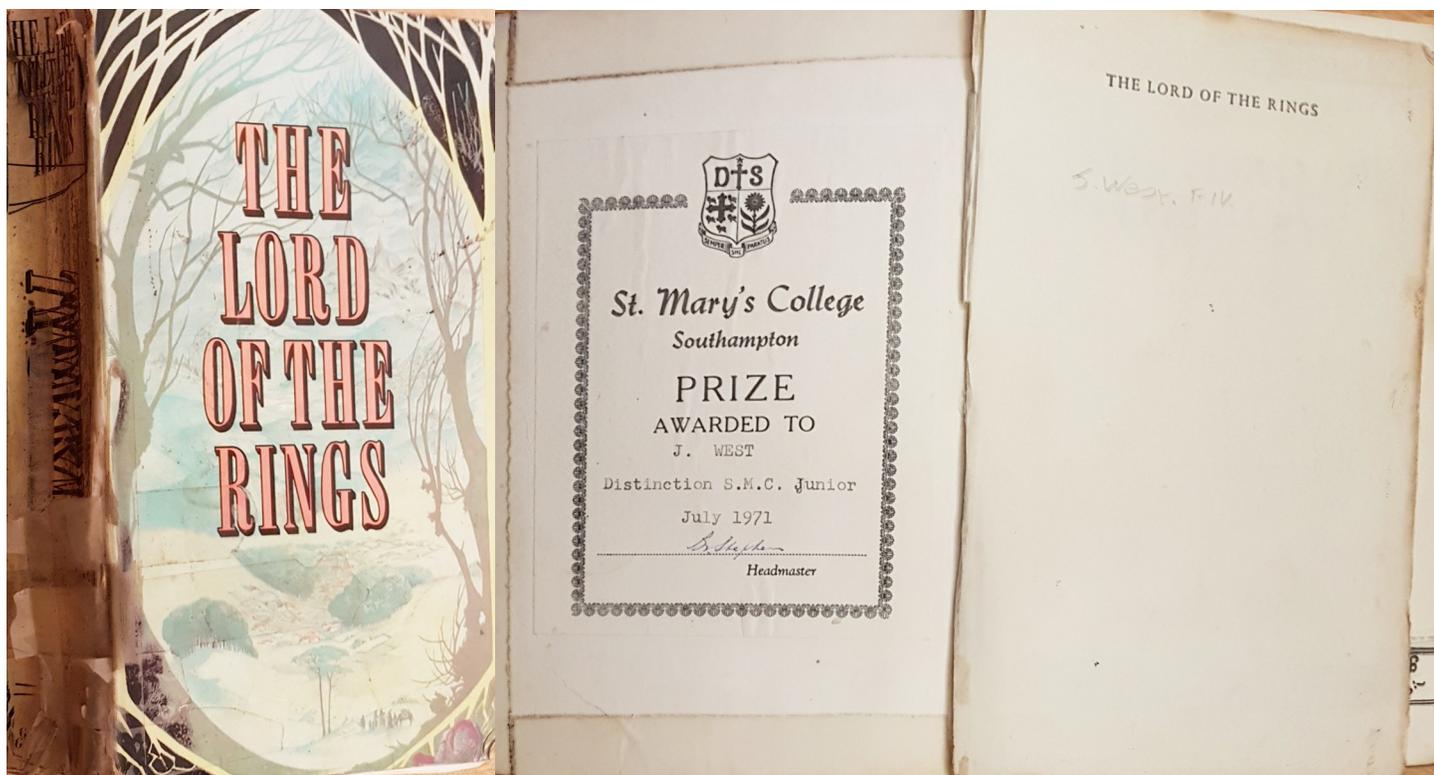
These five actors are very far from being the action heroes a film adaptation would require. On radio, they are entirely convincing. The remaining cast is excellent almost without exception. Peter Woodthorpe reprises the Gollum he provided for Ralph Bakshi, and it's every bit as over the top as Andy Serkis, and all the better for it.

What makes the audio version really work is that it's not afraid to let Tolkien be Tolkien. In the Peter Jackson version, there's a need to protect the audience from too much Tolkien. Let's cut back on those songs and poems. Let's leave out the bits people might find boring. The BBC let the embarrassing parts through. When Bilbo sets off to leave the Shire forever, John Le Mesurier starts singing. It's unexpected, and surprisingly charming. He has a decent voice, but we're reminded that this is not a musical. He's someone who sings when he goes for a walk.

And the leisurely encounters as we start on the adventure make us comfortable, ready to take our time. This was intended to be listened to over twenty-six weeks, after all. So, while Bombadil is not included, we get to visit Farmer Maggot. The Hobbits take their time getting to Bree, and they will take their time getting to Rivendell. This doesn't make the story lag. It helps us to realise that this is a momentous enterprise, that it can't be rushed.

And when we get to the end, it's not rushed either. Tolkien wrote three endings to the story: the destruction of the ring, the return to the Shire, and the departure to the West. The elegiac end to the story is not rushed either. The sadness is not forced but natural. We're sad at the parting of old friends, both in the story, and from us.

Should restrictions lift, and we're able to go on holiday again, I hope to spend some hours driving through Britain. I anticipate that it might be time to give this another outing.





A Universe of Audible Originals

Reviews by Chris Garcia

I. Sandman

I didn't much care for Sandman when it first came out.

I know, I know. It was a turning point for you, and for comics, but really, it just didn't hit with me. There are a lot of comics like that, but with *Sandman*, it was particularly notable. I've never been able to put my finger on it, but halfway through "Prelude & Nocturnes," I was out. Maybe I should have stuck with it, but when Audible announced there was going to be an audio-drama version of *Sandman*, I had to check it out.

And my God, was I impressed!

First off, I was really interested in the cast. James MacAvoy! Bebe Newirth! KAT FUCKING DENNINGS!!! This was not a cast of one big star and a lot of lesser ones. This was an amazing cast of amazing actors, and they were being put in a position to have a lot of solid interaction, audio only, of course. I was sure there'd be something for me, even if the story wasn't for me at all.

I was wrong, and the reason I was wrong was as simple as Neil Gaiman.

There are dangers to having authors read their own work. Sometimes, it's because they are too attached to a concept that the audience doesn't grasp, and if they're invested in that, it can be a difficult hurdle to get over. Here, Neil is the voice of the Narrator which drives a lot of the story. When you're adapt-

ing a graphic novel, you've got to lean on the sound effects and a lot of "tell, don't show." Neil gives weight to the words that makes it a lot cooler, not to mention driving it away from the characters.

That's right, away from the character.

You see, the characters, Dream and the others, they all come to the story with a serious amount of bang, but their notes are, well, one note. Death is a perfect example, brilliantly played by the amazing Kat Dennings. She's that perky goth combination of sadness, and love, and inevitability. It's so damn perfect, but it's also that, and almost nothing else. It drives that sensation to the entire piece, which could easily be overpowering. Then there's Neil, the voice of God, and he rides it back down into the story. I adore it, and it makes everything feel less devoted to character and more dedicated to story.

The use of sound effects and environmental audio is part of what moves this into new territories. The current wave of audio drama has been playing with this, but I can't think of one that has done it better. I adore it, and listening to it again, I find myself diving deeper into the scenes, as opposed to the characters.

And, of course, there's a serial killer convention.

I had read it years ago, but it felt so very fresh. Maybe it's listening with ears that have been seasoned with years' worth of true-crime podcasts. It's tense, but more importantly, it's intense. There's a powerful message, "This is not right," but there's an ancillary message, "This is also real." It does, in fact, speak to the current true-crime phenomenon, but it also forces us to step back and become more in tune with how we interact with others in the realm of our fascinations.

2. *Escape from Virtual Island*

I'm not that into Jack McBreyer.

I know. I know.

He was good in *30 Rock* and I love him on *The Odd Squad Movie*, but ultimately, he's not for me. When I saw that he was one of the main characters for the Audible Original audio drama *Escape from Virtual Island*, I was questioning, but then I saw that Paul Rudd was in it, and he's one of my faves. Also, it was written by another *30 Rock* alum, the great John Lutz. I waded in and was glad for the experience.

Okay. Now the story: a famous inventor gets trapped in the world of his creation and has to fight the computer to get out. It's *West World* meets *TRON* meets *The Searchers*. Along the way, there's a story of them having adventures all over the place, and there's general silliness, romantic shenanigans, and much more.



The thing that gets me about it involves the brilliantly weird chemistry between Rudd and Amber Ruffin. They are written in this weird “Yes! No!” style that kinda moves between 1960s Day-Hudson and 1940s Tracy-Hepburn. They’re great together, and while Amber Ruffin is a national treasure who needs to be more widely known for her work, Paul Rudd is every inch the professional. That dichotomy is strong enough to carry the entire piece.

The real surprise is Jane Krakowski, yet another *30 Rock* alum, and also a big time Broadway star, she’s great playing the inventor of the virtual island, and mother to Rudd’s character. I can’t tell you how perfectly superpower mom she is. Though she’s not in for long, she’s an absolute highlight.

This one really is not to be missed. It’s funny, it’s fun, it knowingly plays with tropes, and it subverts a few of them. It’s very tell-not-show, and that ends up being the perfect way to handle the material.



3. Phreaks

I have been lucky enough to know a few people who were first-generation phone phreaks. The best known of them is, of course, Captain Crunch, AKA John Draper. I’ve known him since I was about ten. He’s got some SERIOUS issues, and today I would never let a teenager hang out with him like we used to when we were kids. The phone phreaks were about one of two things: (1) to subvert the Bell system that they saw as controlling and wrong, or (2) playing around.

A lot of them were really just playing around.

Phreaks, an Audible original, is one of the best pieces of kinda-science fiction you’ll find in the audio-drama world.

It’s not straight sci-fi, of course, because it’s a realist story about the past, but the thrust of the story is scientific, and in a way that made *Hidden Figures* a science-fiction film. The basic story is one of a young woman playing with a piece of technology that was both familiar and far more complicated than expected.

Well, it’s slightly richer than that.

It’s 1970, and Emma Gable ends up meeting a bunch of phone phreaks on a party line. Emma is blind and has a love affair with the phone. As time goes by, this develops into a love affair with the Bell Telephone network. She’s a sheltered teen, but at the same time she’s a dreamer without much space to dream. Her mom works at the local nuclear power plant. Her dad is a handyman at a commune with a secret, and a secret on top of that secret, and at least one more underneath. The story of the Gable family is complex but add to this the story of the Bell employee who is a young go-getter, who ends up getting the toll-fraud division when he wants the organized-crime detail. Finally, there’s this team that he works with who might just be smarter than anyone else in the story. These are the phreaks themselves, and most of all, there’s the beautiful voice work.

It's easy to latch on to Christian Slater, who plays Emma's dad. His voice is perfect as the angry-young-man-gone-angry-middle-aged man, still fighting his demons, and figuring stuff out. It's a great role for him, with impressive range. His interactions with his daughter are great, and the fact that he's juggling relationships and the inability to figure himself out makes it even better.

It's really a smart script, even if things are seldom surprising. It's a period piece, and at the same time, it's a family drama. It's a coming-of-age story, though it's not the adolescent coming-of-age story that we tend to expect. It's a lot of stuff, all at once, and it's such easy listening. Of all the Audible original audio dramas, it's my second favorite, and the one I went back to the fastest. It's that dang good!

4. *Vroom Vroom*

Workplace comedies are classic. *Taxi* is probably my all-time favorite, or maybe *It's a Living*, but no matter what, it's a great setting for a fairly broad comedic piece no matter what the form. In the case of *Vroom Vroom*, it's made better by being a genuine and heartfelt piece.

Let me make one thing totally clear; this is basically the film, *Used Cars*. A plucky bunch of certified pre-owned salespeople have a week to sell a record number of cars or they lose their Fjord Dealership status. The team does it, -- yes, that's a spoiler but really there's no doubt it's going to happen, and it's great.

The show is headlined by the great Andy Richter, and he's wonderful, but Yvette Nicole Brown, Shirley from *Community*, is excellent at providing both the real thrust of the show and a lot of strong comedy. The entire cast is excellent, with a lovely will-they/won't-they couple who are just too adorable. There's a character who is excellent at everything, knows everything, but we had no idea if he could actually sell cars. There's a character who is over-the-top great at his job, but terrible at being a person. There's a heavy who is also a fraud. It's all very recognizable, but that means the colors put on that canvas get to shine.

The best stuff is the voice acting. While there's a lot less sound design than in things like *Sandman*, but the way the characters interact becomes the entirety of the episodes. The silly scenarios, like putting up goal-posts for a kick to win a free car, play so well because the character who selling the ideas feel real. The writing is decent; the scenarios and plot are pretty standard, but the dialogue and the voice-acting are perfection. I think that drives this into the realm of incredibly listenable, and I am hoping we get a second season.



5. *Heads Will Roll*

I am, at the end of the day, a postmodernist.

It might be that growing up reading *There is a Monster at the End of This Book* has ruined me forever. I look for metafiction whenever when I'm given something that plays with postmodern ideas that is meant as low-brow. I'm thinking some of the musicals of the 1950s, for example. I cock my head and go really. I mean just REALLY?

This kinda happened with *Heads Will Roll* by the majestic Kate McKinnon, a filthy and hilarious take on a fairytale idea.

McKinnon plays Mortuana, the latest in a long line of evil queens of the Night Realms, and she's facing a series of miniature crises. There's Bernabus Fanders, the inventor of liberal democracy and debates, who is starting a rebellion. His best friend is a princess who happened to be turned into a raven -- who is played by McKinnon's real-life sister, Emily Lynne -- and, finally, we have her mother, played by the great Andrea Martin, still around as a queen mother of sorts. What's great about the idea is the typicality of it all, which makes the wackiness that much better.

There are all sorts of non-old-timey things that get said, and the whole thing at moments is presented as a TV show. That alone is worth it, but it's played for maximum laughs. McKinnon is built for getting laughs, and more importantly, she's brilliant at dramatizing variation within characters through voice alone. In a way, she's the anti-Kristen Wiig, who makes the voice fit her body, but who really needs that body to get anything across. McKinnon is one of the best voice actors out there today.

The real surprise of the show is the amazing Tim Gunn, fashion icon and all-around superstar. He plays Mortuana's righthand man whose partner back home is a hot-as-shit, wannabe chef who isn't very good at anything and who is going WAY over the renovation budget. He's got such a great presence, as he's working off of McKinnon, and he plays it largely straight . . . pardon the excessive pun. He's so good that when he's talking to Mortuana, he's the star. I was so happy to hear him do so well. He didn't get to play with Meryl Streep, however, who appeared as a celebrity activist who was also the best actress of her generation, which would have been so much fun.

Of course, in anything like this, there are gags for the other comics in the backrow. Mortuana makes prodigious use of "fuckbois" and appears on an interview show where she says, in an attempt to be funny "I'm a gay woman," which had me howling. There are jokes about SNL, about Trump and his relationship with the press, and about so many more things. It's funny, it's pointed, it's dirty, and it's a lot of fun!!!





CRAZY DOG THEATRE

Roger Gregg, Crazy Dog Audio Theatre, and Me

by Pádraig Ó Méalóid

About

the middle of the year 2000, I was probably still working in the Flying Pig on Crow Street, the secondhand bookshop that I co-owned with the near-legendary James Bacon at that time. It was in those days my habit to drop in at some point in the day to say hello to Richie Lawlor, who worked in Sub City, one of Dublin's very few comic shops at the time -- if there hadn't been a building or two in the way you could have stood outside the Flying Pig and pointed up Crow Street, through the little covered passageway marked by the street mosaic of a Stag's Head (for the pub of that name that you would find if you ventured along it), and which was directly across Dame Street from Crow Street, continued on up Dame Court onto Exchequer Street, where Sub City was, two doors down from Dunne's Stores, who were directly facing down onto Dame Court. It was, quite literally two minutes' or less walking time, even allowing for traffic. Because of this I was often the first person in the door after someone had brought something or other in to try to persuade Richie of the wisdom of stocking it in the shop. And this is how I came across Bob Byrne's MBLEH! comics, the late Gerry Hunt's In Dublin City, and Roger Gregg's Crazy Dog Audio Theatre.

As I said, Richie regularly got offered stuff, and he would always draw my attention to them. This time, instead of various kinds of bad (mostly) or good (rarely, but see above) home-grown comics, what he had was a CD called Time Out for Bill Lizard, a half-hour-ish audio science-fictional adventure featuring the titular Bill Lizard, which was written, performed, and produced by Roger Gregg, who did all the voices, all the music, and all the sound effects. And it was good. Gregg was actually an American playwright, composer, audio producer, musician, actor, voice-over artist, who'd been living in Ireland since 1980, it turned out, and had been doing things a lot like this for a while now. It struck me that surely this was just the sort of thing that might be of interest to the people who were running Octocon, Ireland's annual science fiction convention. This turned out to be not only true, but to have quite a phenomenal follow-through.

This is what happened: As far as I recall, I got in touch with James Shields, who I believe was that year's event's chair. He agreed that this was something that the con would be interested in, and one or the other of us contacted Roger, and meetings took place. As it turned out, he had big plans for what should happen. He wanted to write a comedy space opera for several voices, which he would perform live at Octocon. And that wasn't even everything. He had been talking to a radio producer in RTÉ, the Irish national broadcaster, and there was a possibility that the radio play could actually be a literal radio play, and broadcast to the nation. For a science fiction convention, this was an opportunity that couldn't be easily refused.

When Roger had produced Time Out for Bill Lizard, which he had done himself on spec, it had caught the attention of a man called Tim Lehane. Tim had posted in an early Google Group in 1997 looking for audio material for a forthcoming radio programme called Another Time Another Space, saying,

Our programme has a particular audio driven aspect to it. We feature all kinds of strange and different things. To date we have looked at an extremely broad range of experimental music, speech, sounds, audio, from all over the world. Maybe you have unusual items of interest to us, or are a collector of the unusual, old radio recordings, early audio recordings, recordings of the countryside, or train stations, whatever is different, mainstream or not, we are interested.

Roger got in touch with Tim, or vice versa, and Time Out for Bill Lizard was broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1 on Monday 26 April 1999.

And Roger Gregg wasn't the only person Tim Lehane had collaborated with on Irish Radio. He had also, some years earlier, collaborated with my father, also Pádraig, on Preab San Aer (literally A Leap in the Air)—an Irish language programme aimed at a younger audience, also on RTÉ Radio 1, from 1976 and 1988—amongst other things, as well as a book co-authored by the two of them called An Pota Gáire (The

Pot of Laughter), published by An Gúm in 1983. If you search on your local Amazon omni store for Pádraig Ó Méalóid, three books come up. I wrote two of them, and An Pota Gáire is the third one listed, although unavailable. So, when it turned out that Roger wanted the representatives of Octocon to go talk to Tim Lehane and himself, I ended up going along as well—although I don't know if I was actually involved with the convention at the time—on the basis that I knew Tim since I was a young lad, and had lent him Steve Hillage albums and Garth Ennis graphic novels, and this easy familiarity might make it easier all 'round for all the parties to talk.

So talks were had, and went not only smoothly, but also very well. The convention was happy to allow RTÉ to broadcast a radio play live from Octocon on the Saturday of the convention, and to include it as part of their list of scheduled events. They would also act as preliminary intermediary between RTÉ and Crazy Dog Audio Theatre, on one side, and the hotel, on the other. RTÉ on their part were happy to make a broadcasting slot available for the radio play to be actually broadcast in. The room that the performance was to take place in would be paid for by RTÉ, who of course would also be paying all the production costs, paying the actors, and providing all the technical equipment needed to broadcast the performance. Everything was ready to go.

Finally, the day, and the evening, arrived. At 6 PM on Saturday 21 October 2000, just a tiny smidge over twenty years ago, as I write this, those of us who were going to be the audience gathered in the auditorium, where there was to be a briefing from Roger Gregg and Tim Lehane about what was going to happen, an introduction to the players and their characters, and, most importantly, we the audience were to learn of our own part in what was to come. Yes, in proper old-fashioned pantomime style, we also had our part to play.

Then, at 7 PM, the performance began. We were introduced to Captain Roslyn Sane of the Starship Amadán, along with her crew, Rom Mandroid, First Officer Hoax Minstrel, and Counsellor Disco Trojan, in their first—but not their last—adventure across space and time, Invasion from Planet Vampire. And it was joyous. Deanna Davis gave a pitch-perfect Captain Janeway impression in her role as the ship's captain. David Murray ("I'm the romantic male lead," and his puffy-sleeved shirt), Morgan Jones as the constantly baffled robot, and Roger Gregg himself as Counsellor Trojan (cue Rom Mandroid, "Mr Disco is a man???"). It was all high camp, and absolutely absurd, and we loved it.

And the public and critics loved it too. Harry Browne of the Irish Times called it the "radio highlight of 2000," amongst many other things he said about it. It was rebroadcast soon thereafter, which means those of us who had taken part the first time could listen to it, and hear ourselves going, amongst various other crowd-sourced noises, "Kill Captain Sane and her bungling crew, kill Captain Sane and her bungling crew," along with Dervilla the Vampire Queen and her minions, which now included us. When the CD came out (remember them?) the audience got a billing as "warm-blooded leaders of the galaxy," and who can say that we were not?

The following year, 2001, Octocon was back in its then more usual setting, the Royal Marine Hotel in Dun Laoghaire, and this time Roger Gregg and Tim Lehane had upped the ante, and the first two episodes of Big Big Space!, still featuring Captain Sane and her (bungling) crew, two parts of what was a six-part series of half-hour episodes, with the other two recording fits taking place in the same place over the following two weeks. We got to be the picketing members of the ship's Expendable Characters' Union, led by Big Jim Chancer and his Maoist red parrot Polynomial, whose ultimate goal was to get their own spin-off show. We got to be Dr Rotwang Krell's zombies, and fractal quarks from Cork, and pirates ("Yo Ho Ho!!"), an all sorts. It was some of the best fun we'd ever had with our clothes on. But this was to be the Starship Amadán's last

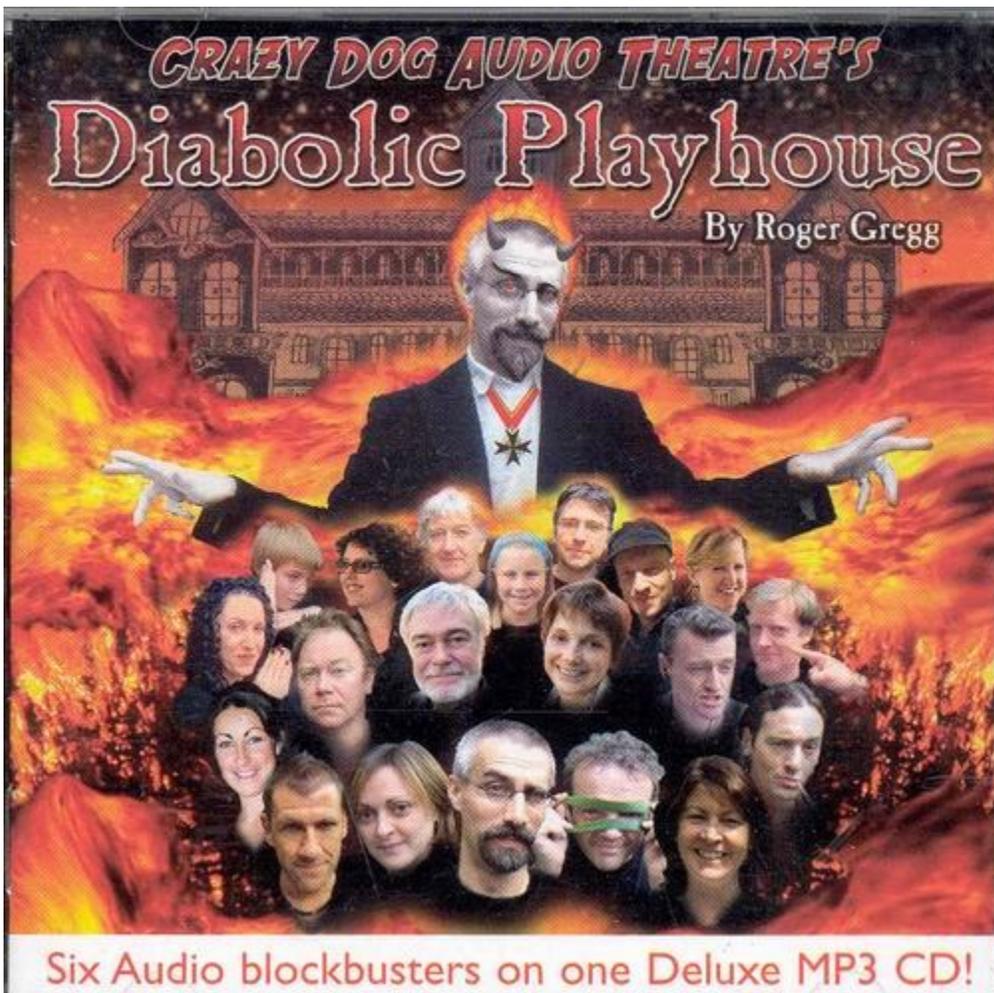
outing.

Come 2002, although the performances had moved to RTÉ Radio's headquarters in the leafy suburb of Donnybrook, and was more Octocon-adjacent than actually part of the proceedings, we still got to be part of it, and all six 25-minute episodes of Crazy Dog Live were broadcast live. In one episode James Shields got to be in charge of a hand-crafted wind-generating machine. I made a joke about a fan-assisted wind generator, but nobody laughed except me . . .

There was no Octocon in 2003, though, and it looked like the thread was unravelling. Crazy Dog continued to produce work, and I'd occasionally come across some of the members in unlikely places. Morgan Jones (who, despite the name, is not Welsh) was regularly to be heard doing voice-overs on radio ads (One they're gone, they're gone!). He's also the only person I know, to my knowledge, who had been excommunicated by the Catholic Church. On a visit to Edinburgh in the mid-ish 2000s we happened to see David Murray in a local soap called River City, playing an alcoholic and philandering Irish priest. He also turned up as Jumpy Thug in Batman Begins, causing myself and my cinema-going companion to say 'David Murray!' very loudly to an otherwise mystified Dublin cinema audience. Roger Gregg still writes and performs and got to play Eddie the Computer in the third and fifth phases of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy radio series, amongst much else. The Royal Dublin Hotel, where it all started, was closed in 2008, and demolished in 2009, just in time for the global crash to hijack the development plans, and remains an empty site on O'Connell Street. The Royal Marine Hotel, for my money the best venue Octocon ever had, closed down for extensive renovations, meaning

the con had to find a new home.

Worldcon took place in Dublin in 2019, and Roger produced a radio play for it, which I attended in the company of old friend Juliet McKenna, who had first attended Octocon in 2001, and had enthusiastically reviewed the CD set of Big Big Space! For The Alien Online, an online reviews site we both contributed to. Some years before, staying in Juliet's house in Oxford whilst attending Eastercon in Heathrow, we had listened to those CDs as we drove through England, convention bound. These are the things that make our lives better. I don't doubt that Roger Gregg and Crazy Dog Audio Theatre would have thrived in



my absence, but I like to think I helped things happen just a little bit.



Indy Audio Dramas Worth Your Time

by **Christopher J. Garcia**

The democratization of media means that anyone can make a show, but most shows just won't get ingested.

I'm hella guilty of this. I support tiny podcasts, but the reality is I mostly listen to the big ones in their segment. For every *Old Timey Crimey*, or *Known Unknowns*, or *Crime nor Reason*, I listen to there's two *Last Podcast on the Lefts* or *Serial Killers*. It's all about a combination of laziness (we really don't wanna have to dig for our entertainment, do we?), and that we are attracted to names we know. I am so big into things on Audible that I miss a lot of indy stuff.

Luckily, one of the people who saw my short video for a panel I had to skip during NASFiC and set me towards some amazing material!

1. *The Tales of Sage and Savant*

I'm bummed it doesn't look like there's going to be more of this wonderful time-travel audio drama. The voice acting is decent, it's a touch rough for the first few episodes, but ultimately it turns into something much more interesting than you'd expect. It's all about setting with this one. The Victorian era setting makes it a lot of fun, and there's less time-travel strangeness than you'd imagine. I found myself tying some of the individual episodes to stories I love, and there's little that makes me happier than when things fit in with my past readings/viewings/listening. Four seasons, of which I only managed to listen to the first, but overall, it's a lot of fun.

[2. It's About Time](#)

Okay, I had a few problems with this one, but I have to say that the series was funny. The comedy is pretty dang broad, there are a fair number of over-the-top queer stereotypes that stick out. It's a story of a time-travel agency, which has been done, but it's your basic two idiots get thrown into adventure, and they have a lot of fun. It's funny, they have good timing, and the voice acting is clean, though nothing impressive. The first episode was half set-up, half delivery. That makes it feel a bit simple, but when it gets going, it's dang fun. I wouldn't say it's a must listen, but it's not a wasted listen.

[3. Caravan](#)

The idea of sound design in an audio drama is so very important. It's easy to look at something like *Tanis* and see how the atmospheric sound design plays with the story, and in *Caravan*, it is pointedly deployed to give the sensation of the time and place. The voice acting is great, but where it hits the heights is with the integration of the interstitial music. That makes it so very strong and gives it a filmic sense that I really enjoy. The story itself is super-smart, a weird-west tale that hits so many notes. I love the demon-laden bounty hunter caravan story, and it comes at you with such perfect design and production.

[3. Oz9](#)

One of my favorite lesser-known outer space comedies, *Other Space*, gives you a sort of combination of bumbling comedy and super-smart comedy. There are few audio dramas that walk that line as smartly as *Oz9*. It's that sort of sarcastic comedy that science-fiction comedians do so well. I found myself laughing hard at this one.

[5. Relativity](#)

If you want a crash course in how to instantly throw your listeners into a story, *Relativity* is the one you should start with. Half *The Martian* and half *Last Man on Earth*, it's a dark, funny, confusing, and brilliantly put together drama that emphasizes the strangeness of the scenario. One thing that is impressive is how they make these communications between a woman on Earth and a man who has survived some sort of . . . incident. The entire show is based around comms between the far and here, and that alone makes it super smart, because you are forced to come to grips with a combination of lies, half-truths, and unspoken realities. While I hate the lead male's voice, I found myself able to push past that and into an awesome and enjoyable show.



“Organs Hanging”: The Inside-Out Story of a Classic Radio Horror by Helena Nash

I was about ten-years old when I first heard the story of “Organs Hanging.” We were on a family camping holiday on the Isle of Wight. The campsite was really a set of small woodland clearings perched at different levels on a precarious cliffside on the island’s southern edge; a coastline notorious for dropping a few hundred tons of rock, earth and holiday cottage into the crashing rocky sea below every few years. It was a site made for the telling of scary stories.

My dad’s friend Dave was the teller of tales this one summer night, as we sat in front of the tent, the Calor gas lantern hanging from the awning and the distinctive smell of a burning spiral insect repellent in the air. Dave has a rich, warm voice and a great way with voices and accents. He would regularly entertain my brother and I with funny stories, adventurous stories, science-fiction stories, and on this particular night, a horror story. Here’s how it went:

It’s a little town somewhere in America. A man goes to a house at night. It is all dark. He opens the door and finds the body of a person on the floor inside. Only the body is inside out! All of the inside bits are on the outside – his or her organs are literally hanging out! And they’re still alive! Then the man sees an even greater horror – it is a living black puddle on the floor which oozes closer towards him. He can’t get away! The black puddle catches him and swallows him up. As it does, it turns him inside out with a terrible SLURRRPing noise like a wet rubber glove being peeled off. The end.

At least, that’s all we could remember of the story afterward. Over the years my brother, my dad and I would hark back to Dave’s amazing, terrifying story every so often. We always called it “Organs Hanging.”

After all, that was the most memorable thing about the story: people being turned inside out. I can still hear Dave's voice as he acted out the horror in the man's voice, narrating the appalling inside-out person gurgling away, and the inescapable, crawling dark thing that seemed to exist purely to inflict the most terrible of fates on innocent people. It was the stuff of nightmares. No wonder we all remembered that one campfire story above all others.

"Organs Hanging" left quite the impression on us, and as I grew up, there was always a little niggle in the back of my head, "where did that story that Dave told us come from?" It was some sort of American horror story obviously, but we had no idea if it was a film, a book, a comic or a TV program. As it turned out, it was none of the above.

The fascination for that sort of tale – the lonely house, the darkness, the body horror, the inhuman entity at the threshold – stayed with me. When I discovered the books of H.P. Lovecraft, it was his story "The Thing on the Doorstep" that rang a bell in my memory. A recollection of huddling outside a tent in a lonely wooded glade on a precarious cliff-top came back to me. Later, listening to the 1989 audio cassette of "The Thing on the Doorstep" – narrated by the actor David Healy in his rich Orson Welles-like tones – brought all those old campsite shudders back. I used to lend the tape to my friends, challenging them to listen to it on a Walkman, in bed and with the lights out, "for the full experience."

Fast forward a couple of decades. The internet is now a thing. Finally, we can all start searching online for long-unanswered childhood mysteries like, "What was that cartoon in which Popeye teamed up with Flash Gordon?" and "What was the horror film when all the dogs go mad and are controlled by one intelligent red-eyed Doberman?" (both genuine Internet searches of mine from way back). And of course, "What is the name of the story where the black puddle turns people inside out?" It turns out that both I and my brother Morgan had both tried to find the answer. I'd had little success, except to conclude that it certainly wasn't called Organs Hanging; searching the internet with those keywords came back with entirely the wrong sort of results. But when all you've got to go on is "horror," "inside-out people," "black puddle thing," it's not surprising that the story's source remained as elusive as a real nightmare.

Morgan was more persistent than me in his search, and at length, he struck gold. He found the true name of the story. It was forgettably named "The Dark." No wonder we'd had so much trouble tracking it down. Better still, he'd acquired a CD of "The Dark," part of a compilation called *Drop Dead!* ("an exercise in horror!"), and so at long last we listened to the long-lost tale of organs hanging (now relegated to lower case) for the first time in twenty-five or thirty years.

And it did not disappoint. Our collective memory of the brief plot, such as it is, was not far from the mark; there was a house, an inside out person, and a black thing on the floor that inflicted the same awful fate on the central characters. At eight minutes long, it's short, terrifying and honestly brilliant. Perfect for scaring 10 years olds of all ages. The sound's a little crackly to be sure, but the acting from the two main characters (plus the "giggling madwoman" and other assorted horrors) and the sound effects are just great.

So, where did "The Dark" come from? Well, it turns out that it was an episode from an old-timey radio horror story from an American show called *Lights Out*. All of this was news to us; growing up in 1970s Britain, our childhood scares came directly from *Doctor Who* and other tea-time TV terrors (or *Tales of the Unexpected* if you were allowed to stay up late). Radio spook stories had been a thing for our parents' generation, hosted by actors such as Valentine Dyall as the ghoulish Man in Black for the BBC's *Appointment with Fear* in the 1940s and 50s.

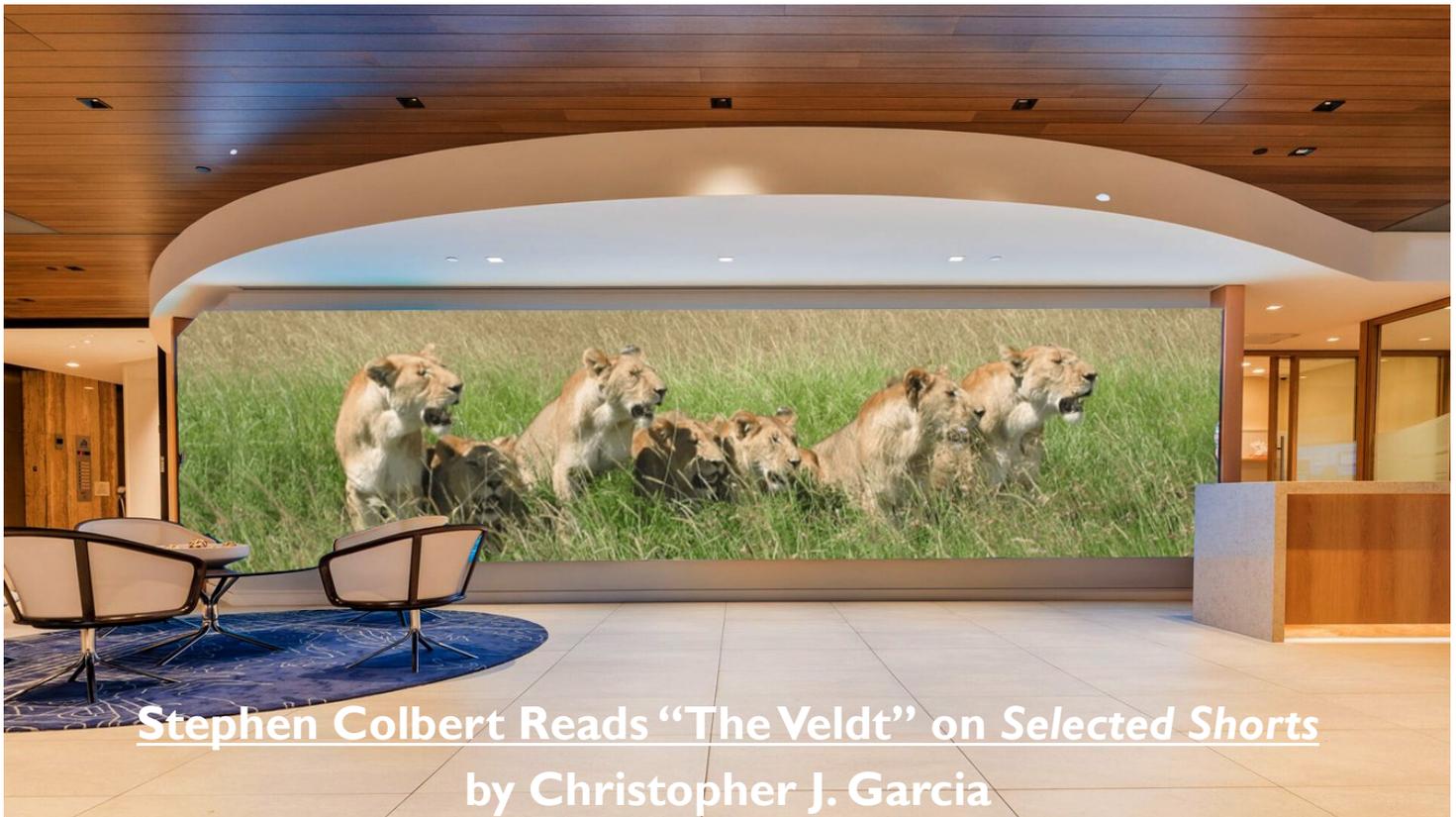
Lights Out was a midnight anthology series that was broadcast by NBC off and on from 1934 through to 1947. It was the brainchild of Wyllis Cooper who turned out an impressive series of grim crime and supernatural tales, before handing the show over to the energetic Arch Oboler in 1936. It was Oboler who was responsible for 1937's episode *The Dark*, among other tales now regarded as classics. *Chicken Heart* (in which the titular organ grows to the size of a city – honestly, it's really good), *Cat Wife* (a woman actually does turn into a cat – eat your heart out, Val Lewton), and *Burial Service* (being buried alive) are a few of the more memorable ones. Though many of the original *Lights Out* broadcasts have been lost, the more popular stories from both the Cooper and Oboler eras were recreated and recorded in later years. It's most likely that Dave first heard the story of organs hanging on a 1962 album of Oboler's greatest hits – the self-same *Drop Dead!* that Morgan later tracked down in CD format (and also now available to listen to online).

I'm pleased that we finally go to the bottom of the mystery. To shine a light on "The Dark." It doesn't take away from the childhood thrill of terror that we felt. Knowing that it is a radio story that others may have heard, and can still hear if they dare, makes it that much better, that much realer. And I now I can always listen to it in bed with the lights out, if I really want.

So there is the long and winding trail of Organs Hanging – from 1930s radio to 1960s vinyl to an Isle of Wight campsite in the 1970s and on into the twenty-first century. Just like the nameless black entity of *The Dark*, once it gets inside you, it's with you forever.

Footnote: Wyllis Cooper later created a similar radio anthology series called Quiet, Please (1947-49), which produced another crop of fine audio terrors for your listening pleasure. I highly recommend "The Thing on the Fourble Board," and not just because it starts with "The Thing on the."





Stephen Colbert Reads “The Veldt” on *Selected Shorts*
by Christopher J. Garcia

Stephen Colbert is an incredibly talented man. He always has been.

Ray Bradbury’s “The Veldt” might be the finest science-fiction short story ever written. I say this as a guy who does a podcast dedicated to short stories!

You are listening to [Short Story. Short Podcast](#), right?

Anyhow, the story is simple, brutal, and beautifully written. It is Bradbury at the height of his powers writing about a future that has damn-near come to pass! The story of a family whose “nursery” is the home of a holographic nightmare, it so great, and has been anthologized and adapted many times. The first I know of is as a part of the series *X Minus One* from the 1950s, but it’s been done in all sorts of ways. In 2006, the NPR show *Selected Shorts* gave Colbert the chance to read the story.

It is a masterpiece of a reading.

At the time, Colbert was still best known for his work on *The Daily Show*, and I think we might have had a year of *The Colbert Report*. He was known as a comedian, but he was also known as world-class fantasy nerd. His love of *The Lord of the Rings* is legendary. I thought this was going to be interesting, and when I tuned in while driving my beat-up Ford Fiesta, I was amazed.

Colbert has a voice that is made to delve into emotional depths, and there are few others who manage what he did here. To understand the joy and usefulness of the pause is a rare and powerful thing. Colbert hits notes in this so well, especially when he is going to his secondary voices. He gives women a femininity that isn’t womanly, but still allows you to know that there is a woman speaking. He does children’s voices in a way that isn’t imitating children. but nonetheless gives us an idea of a child speaking by simple variation. It’s impressive for a performer to slip through characters without losing the thread of their signature vocal style.

When Colbert is giving us the mother, he is Colbert without question, but at the same time, he's clearly giving us the mother. It's wonderful.

As he tells the story of the children in the nursery, of the family, of what the promise of television will undoubtedly lead to, Colbert gives us an emotive reading that never allows his performance to take control from the story, and at the same time, he hits every note of the story with exactly the right tone, the right weight. Every performer knows that the material is the truck, and you're the driver. Colbert is an expert driver, no doubt.

I love "The Veldt," and I think when we finally do cover it on *Short Story, Short Podcast*, I'm going to reference this performance heavily.





Power Records: The Action Comes Alive! by Chuck Surface

I can't do audio formats. When friends went mad for *Welcome to Nightvale*, *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*, and podcasts, I hoped for print editions of these recordings so I could join the fun. Thankfully, the forces behind *Welcome to Nightvale* have come through for me, publishing scripts I can read while listening to episodes. But otherwise, so be it. If my work commute were longer than ten minutes I might partake more easily since driving would scaffold my concentration. I can read for hours, shotgun Netflix series, but audio . . . sorry. I start to drift off like a kindergartener at story hour. Even music puts me out unless I'm simultaneously working or otherwise engaged.

Welcome to Nightvale isn't my first experience with pairing text and audio. In graduate school, I often watched Shakespearean performances with copies of the plays open before me. This sharpened my focus and highlighted differences between page and stage, revealing how and why directors interpreted the Bard. The seedbed of this listening technique, however, is Power Records – the action “comes alive” as you read!

During the 1970s, Power Records, a subsidiary of Peter Pan Records, produced a vast catalog of seven- and twelve-inch records packaged with special comics. This line included adaptations and original materials based on licensed franchises -- *Space:1999*, *Star Trek*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Looney Tunes* – and traditional legends, Robin Hood for example. Of course, Power also added selections from Marvel and DC, all as mood enhancing as eight-ball cocaine hits. Everything from mainstream heroes, to Conan, to Marvel horror was fair game. Day and night, I'd commandeer my mother's massive console stereo (not just a sound system but actual furniture), move aside the Tennessee Ernie Ford, Eddie Arnold, and Charlie Rich records, and park myself to read along while a host of uncredited narrators and voice actors injected emotion and movement into stories I'd experienced previously when they were first released.

Hyper-nostalgic fans have uploaded Power Records releases on to YouTube, complete with Power-Point slide presentations of the accompanying comics. A simple search initiates a process that eats away several hours if not days of valuable time. Which are my favorites from that period, I think someone may have asked?

1. Dracula: "Terror in the Snow!"



In 1971, the Comics Code Authority, which had been dictating comics content since 1954, loosened its guidelines, opening the door for vampires, werewolves, mummies, and other monsters to appear in mainstream, color, regular-format stories. Marvel Comics took full advantage and initiated their Marvel horror titles: *The Monster of Frankenstein*, *Werewolf by Night*, *Ghost Rider*, *Man-Thing*, *The Son of Satan*, and the flagship book, *The Tomb of Dracula*. Power Records cashed in on this successful trend, slightly altering stories and titles, cleaning them up for family audiences. The story from *Tomb of Dracula* #19, "Snowbound in Hell!" became the tamer, *Dracula: Terror in the Snow!* Dracula and his enemy, Rachel Van Helsing, are lost in the Transylvanian Alps. A brutal snowstorm's underway, and to survive the pair must ally, albeit tenuously. The unsung actor voicing Dracula is more camp than menacing, but with a story from Marv Wolfman you can't go

wrong.

2. *The Monster of Frankenstein*

To my knowledge, *The Monster of Frankenstein* is the only Power release adapted from the first issue of any comic. This is your standard origin story of the Monster, pepped up with outstanding art by Mike Ploog. I realize now that the actor portraying the Monster also voiced the Hulk and other brutish characters. Other cast members are recognizable across recordings too. Today, Fred Tatasciore's bellows and growls define the emerald giant for many animated features and series, and Mark Hamill's Joker always steals the show. These contemporary actors have received the accolades they're due. Power Records did no such favor for its anonymous actors.



3. *The Curse of the Werewolf*



Yes, busted. I love Marvel's Bronze Age horror! My mother dreaded trips to Woolworth's, because without fail I'd come running up the aisle, waving another Power Record, almost always Marvel horror. Here *Werewolf by Night* becomes *The Curse of the Werewolf*, maybe because it'd sell more copies? To my dismay, Power never went with *Son of Satan*. I understand why, however. Editors can clean up excesses from other horror titles, but what to do with a character literally the son of the Devil? I would have been that kid jumping up and down spasmodically if he'd found a *Son of Satan* recording among the stacks. My mother would have been the parent grinning sheepishly at other adults who might think we were hanging with Anton Szandor LaVey down at that funky temple with the interesting man-goat statue out front. I resent this omission and related judgmental attitudes, but I get it.

4. *Plastic Man: The Invasion of the Plastic Men and Metamorpho the Element Man: Fumo the Fire Giant*

Recently when I discovered that Jeff Lemire was making Plastic Man and Metamorpho teammates in his superhero team, the Terrifics, I happily threw my money across the counter. Ramona Fradon's Metamorpho shines among my earliest superhero-related memories, and I'm waiting patiently for DC to release a collected edition of *Plastic Man* (Vol. 2) from the Silver and Bronze Ages. DC shapeshifters for the win!

This seven-inch record features two original stories. On Side A, Plastic Man deals with an invasion of fake Plastic Men. Side B gives us Metamorpho battling Fumo, the Fire Giant. "BOW DOWN BEFORE FUMO!!!!" Alas, there's no accompanying comic, and the writers go overboard with having their characters physical actions. I can't blame them, however. The central characters are shapeshifters, a power not readily adaptable to short, non-visual formats. Still, the tales are fun, and there are theme songs, really bad ones sung by wannabe Turtles or Herman's Hermits groups, mercifully uncredited. The brave among you can find full versions online. As a warning I'll leave you with just a taste:



“Plastic Man”

Plastic Man!

Plastic Man!

Plastic Man!

He’s a real good guy in a bright red suit,
And he always wears goggles and a belt that’s a beaut!
He was a crook, but he reformed,
And then he reformed, and reformed, and reformed again!

Plastic Man! Plastic Man!

The one, the original elastic man,
Always in great shape for the shape he’s in . . .

“Metamorpho”

Metamorpho! Metamorpho!

Metamorpho! Metamorpho!

This is the story of the Element Man!
(Metamorpho! Metamorpho!)
Starts out in old Egypt land!
(Metamorpho! Metamorpho!)
Rex Mason was his real name!
(Metamorpho! Metamorpho!)
A soldier of fortune he didn’t care about fame!
(Metamorpho! Metamorpho!)
Until fate took a hand in the game, what a change, so strange!

Metamorpho! Metamorpho!

Metamorpho! Metamorpho!

Trapped in a pyramid he saw a light.
(Metamorpho! Metamorpho!)
It came from a glowing meteorite!
(Metamorpho! Metamorpho!)
Shooting cosmic rays from within the sun,
Through his body and brain, and when it was done,
There! Yeah! There! Yeah! There stood the Element Man! . . .