

Submitted for Your Approval...

By Tony Fonseca

Zicree, Mark Scott. *The Twilight Zone Companion*. 2nd edition. Beverly Hills: Silman-James, 1992. c. 1982. 466 p.

When Rod Serling received his bachelor's degree in literature in 1950, it took him no more than a year to break into television, writing scripts for Fireside Theater, Hallmark Hall of Fame, Kraft Television Theatre, and Studio One. His 1955 script for *Patterns* was a huge hit, and was followed soon after by *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (CBS's Playhouse 90 series). Serling, however, was disillusioned with the editorial process that his scripts were subject to, as all political statements, as well as treatments of ethnicity found their way to the cutting room floor. To gain better control of his own message, he created his own showcase, choosing science fiction and dark fantasy as his vehicle for metaphorically dealing with taboo issues. Thus, *The Twilight Zone* was born in 1959.

An instant classic, the series originally ran from 1959 to 1965 and is still cultivating a cult following around the world while in syndication. The anniversary edition of Marc Scott Zicree's *The Twilight Zone Companion* (originally published 1982) comes across as a labor of love, a respectful homage for both Serling and the series itself, which will sit well with the millions of fans whose imaginations were broadened by years of exposure to the “what if” scenarios of Serling, Charles Beaumont, and Richard Matheson. Zicree spent five years researching and writing to produce the companion, and it is no overstatement to say that the end product of his labors should be considered the definitive book on the series. In fact, it is difficult to imagine watching a *Twilight Zone* episode without Zicree's guide, which enlightens readers on virtually every aspect of the classic television series. Within the first five minutes of every episode, I find myself running to grab Zicree's book off my bedside bookshelf to read up on the nuts and bolts of episode conception, production, and behind-the-scenes lore. The best way I can describe it is to say that it is like watching genius unfold, while simultaneously enjoying the finished product of brilliance.

The strength of Zicree's guide lies in its organization, particularly given the author's penchant for simplicity and standardization. Some reviewers refer to this as the “dictionary” quality of the guide, which I believe is an accurate descriptor. The index actually makes it possible for the book to be used as a compliment to the series—while watching the series. As long as the viewer knows one of the main actors in an episode, he/she can easily find that episode by using Zicree's index. The information that accompanies each entry then serves to make watching the episode more enjoyable. The description of each gives a captioned still from the episode; a listing of the cast and crew, including writer; Serling's signature spoken introduction and final comments, which bookend a plot synopsis; interesting tidbits and behind-the-scenes information; and favorite quotes from writers, actors, and directors associated with each episode.

If that weren't enough to whet any fan's appetite, the book opens with an extensive biographical discussion of Serling, and has smaller biographical interludes concerning Beaumont and Matheson, as well as a few directors and actors. Ending each chapter is information that encapsulates the season as a whole. When all is said and done, what really makes this text so enjoyable are the spotlights briefly placed on the personalities involved with the shows' five seasons. For example, there are interviews with Billy Mumy and Burgess Meredith, two of the actors most often used by Serling in the series.

Zicree's reissue of the book adds a couple of sections after the discussion of the fifth (and final) season episodes: "After *Twilight Zone*" and "The Eighties." In these short chapters, readers get the inside story of Serling's role in *Night Gallery*, the events leading up to his death in 1975, and the various remakes and adaptations of his scripts by later producers and directors. One could say that this book is a tribute to Serling himself, and not be far from wrong. As such, it is a rare piece of scholarship, one that showcases both the author's research competence and his organization skills, and his pure delight in the subject matter. That is indeed a potent combination.

Necropsy: The Review of Horror Fiction, Volume XXVIII (Winter 2008)