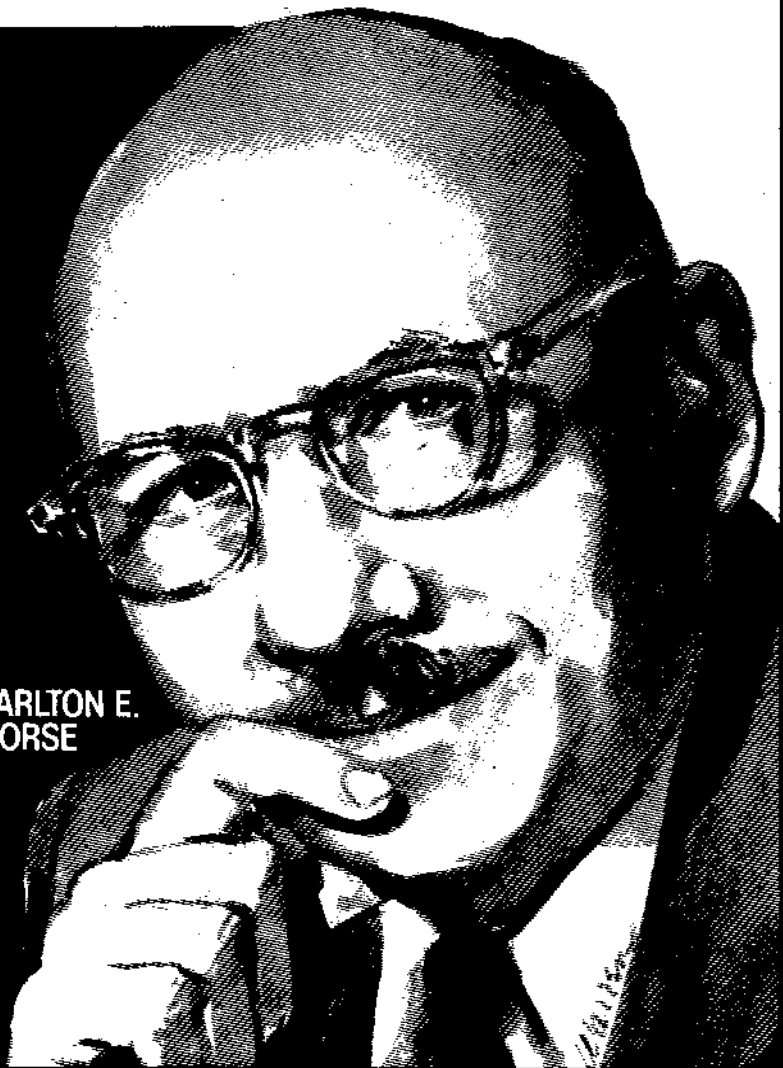


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No. 25

January-February 1988 \$2.50

CARLTON E.
MORSE



Old Time Radio DIGEST

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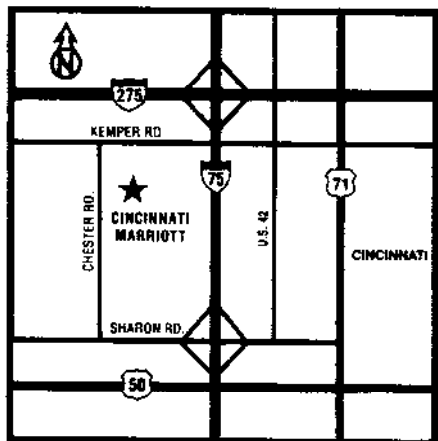
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Private Eyes for Public Ears

by Jim Maclise

I Love A Mystery recruited its converts from 1939 to 1944, then held a revival meeting which began in October 1949 and ended in December 1952. Who can forget it? Even if you weren't there. The A-1 Detective Agency just off Hollywood Boulevard with its scrumptious secretary, either Jerry Booker or Mary Kaye Brown, equally temptations. Jack, Doc, and Reggie, proprietors and partners. They'd take on any case you could carry. Need a few wild grand-daughters tamed? No problem. Want a temple of vampires fumigated? These were the boys for the job. Have a werewolf or two that needs declawing? They'll be there with the big clippers. Does your local graveyard need transplanting? Call the A-1 gang. Having trouble with the mob? Let our guys clean up your town. Church bells keeping you awake at night? A-1 will silence them.

Of course, their services didn't come cheap. A little insurance job they tackled up in Seattle involving a missing millionaire and a wildcat cost the company 25,000. 1949 dollars. And solving the grand-daughter problem cost Grandma Martin one and a half grand-daughters, her only grandson, plus the family chauffeur. Exterminating the vampires reduced the temple to rubble, and the detective trio skipped out on the werewolf job (the first one, anyway). As for graveyards, once Jack, Doc and Reggie arrive, you'll want to expand into the local golf links because you'll need all the ground you can dig up. When these fellows hit town, corpses bloom like pansies in a hothouse.

Jack Packard is the head man for A-1, and he doesn't believe in much. An ex-medical student who can tell a corpse

from a zombie, he has no use for the gentle sex because one of them roughed him up once in his youth and he's neither forgotten, forgiven, nor talked about it. Being a fighter pilot during World War II didn't soften him any. So he's a hardcore cynic who puts no stock in the supernatural, even if a werewolf starts using his neck as a teething ring. He'd drag the creature down to the city pound for a dog license, even with human hair in its teeth during a full moon.

Doc Long, the red-headed Texan, on the other hand, is a yours truly believer. If you cut your finger, Doc will spin you a yarn about the hometown vampire (sweet little critter) who drank six quarts of his cousin Winnie Mae's blood just before she ran the mile at the Wamperjaw Texas, Junior Olympics while carrying his grandma on her back. Doc's also an incorrigible lady's man, and flirts with anything that wears a skirt. He's hell-bent for adventure, preferably including fist-fighting and alligator wrestling.

Reggie York is the third member of the A-1 Agency, a white-haired young Englishman who is painfully modest around attractive women, but who like Doc enjoys nothing so much as a good old-fashioned set-em-up and knock-em-down water front brawl, preferably sailor fashion. Still he's the complete gentleman, so he'll probably apologize in advance before supplanting a few of your teeth with his knuckles. He's also the genteel workhorse of the agency and can carry a sleeping Chinese girl over miles of mountainous terrain if it becomes necessary (and it does).

Carlton E. Morse wrote, directed, and produced the series for NBC's Blue

Network out of Hollywood during the early years, and for Mutual in New York during its later run. The initial cast featured Michael Raffetto as Jack, Barton Yarborough as Doc, and Walter Paterson as Reggie. All three actors also had key parts in Morse's other classic serial *One Man's Family*. During the 1949-52 series, Russell Thorson was a less caustic Jack, Jim Boles a somewhat milder, more down-home style Doc Long, and Tony Randall a superior Reggie York. (Because Walter Paterson died in 1940, Reggie appears only in the early adventures of both series, as the revival used the same scripts from which Reggie was dropped. Thereafter secretary Jerry Booker was sometimes given a larger part.)

A large percentage of *I Love A Mystery* was absolutely first-rate radio mystery and adventure, expertly acted, wonderfully written, and with startling and convincing sound effects (of which Morse was justly proud). All of this can be most readily experienced in the surviving chapters of "The Pirate Loot of the Island of Skulls" from the 1942 half-

hour format, which is the closest to complete among the original serials. The way Raffetto and Yarborough deliver their sarcasm, the night sounds of the island, the echoes in the cavern are all wonderful to hear. (It's also rather depressing because it reminds one of what's sadly missing in today's radio and television.) Individual episodes of this early series, such as "The Mayor of Roxie," "Secret Girl in the Gilded Cage" are worth owning, even though they're frustratingly incomplete, being only one of fifteen or twenty-episode adventures. However, no serial from this classic early period of ILAM exists in complete form; at least not for today's collector.

The 1949-52 New York Mutual series, duplicating the earlier scripts, is more readily available. A half-dozen serials exist either complete, or close enough to it. Of the first six, only the first remains seriously reduced.

October 1949—"The Fear That Creeps Like a Cat" (2 chapters)
10/31 to 11/18—"The Thing That Cries in the Night" (complete)



Carlton E. Morse, 85, still finds enthusiasm to write novels

- 11/21 to 12/9—"Bury-Your-Dead, Arizona" (complete)
 12/12 to 12/30—"The Richard Curse" (12/23 episode missing)
 1/2/50 to 1/27—"Temple of Vampires" (9 chapters missing)
 1/30 to 2/22—"The Battle of the Century" (4 missing)

Note: SPERDVAC's script library can supply all nine missing "Temple of Vampire's chapters if you're a member.

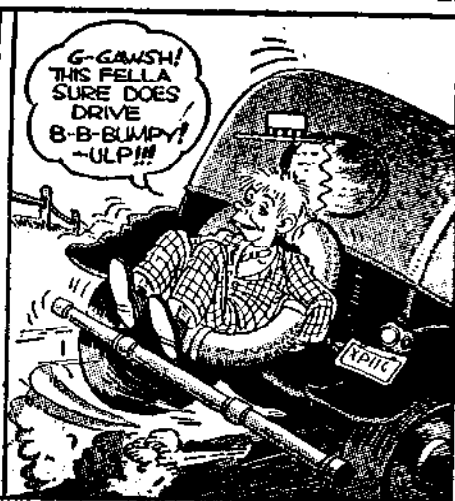
In the adventures listed (minus the first one with its two excellent and tantalizing early chapters), Jack, Doc, and Reggie, plus a number of harried female characters (most of whom are played by the great Mercedes McCambridge, about to win an Academy Award for *All The King's Men* — 1950) spend their time in Hollywood mansions where slashings, stairway tumbles, and murders, all to the tune of a mysterious baby's crying, take place with unnerving regularity; or in boxcars with a three hundred pound magician and his attractive Russian female apprentice who can disappear seemingly at will from the speeding train; or in

vampire dens where Angelina with the ruby lips and the sharp and oh-so-white teeth plays den mother to bats the size of boy scouts. Or the three comrades may be roughed up, blown up, or shot up by members of the mob in Southern California while protecting lovely Sunny Richard from her family curse; or fighting brawls with twin farm-hands built like oxen and just as dumb, while defending the honor of a pretty freckle-faced rancher's daughter. In the 1952 "Hermit of San Felipe Adavapo," a sequell to "Stairway to the Sun" (also available complete in script form only from SPERDVAC), Jack and Doc are climbing a mountain in South America in search of ancient mystics who preach spiritual enlightenment. (Warning: the tape of this mostly complete adventure was made on a home wire recorder off-the-air and is often barely listenable.) Vampires, werewolves, family curses, mystic mountains, hired killers, earthquakes may cause some momentary problems, but the A-1 Detective Agency trio handles them all wirth relative ease and

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returns to their Hollywood Boulevard office mostly intact and eager for the next case.

In addition to the serials cited above, many single or double episodes exist, teasingly incomplete. These include "The Snake with the Diamond Eyes," a terrific July 1950 chapter, or the two chapters of 1951's "Murder Is the Word for It," which almost reveal the whole story. A number of ILAM serials had a Western flavor, and these are represented in the double chapter fragments of "The Killer of the Circle M," "The Graves of Wamperjaw, Texas," and "Murder in Turquoise Pass." (Note that the Wamperjaw chapters are reversed on the reels of most dealers, and the second episode should be heard first.)

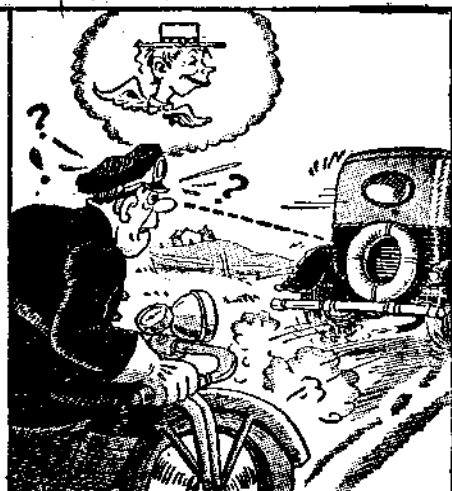
A problem for many years now among veteran OTR buffs is that collecting *I Love A Mystery* has become a dead end. No new material has surfaced since SPERDVAC came up with the two chapters of "The Fear that Creeps Like a Cat" in 1979. There were rumors then that the complete original 1940 "Temple

of Vampires" was about to surface, but nothing happened. Who wouldn't sell the family Rembrandts or hock the Rolls Silver Ghost in order to purchase "The Case of the Transplanted Castle," "The Decapitation of Jefferson Monk" (one script chapter is around), or "My Beloved Is a Vampire"? Or how about "Terror of Frozen-Corpse Lodge" (is this another title for "Incident Concerning Death" which exists in a single chapter involving a frozen corpse in a lodge basement?), or "Whose Body Got Buried?" or "The Monster in the Mansion," or another dozen intriguing titles I could name for you? In fact, the terrible news is that there were over forty complete ILAM adventure serials broadcast from 1949 to 1952 over Mutual, yet only a handful are in circulation. Where are the others? The all too likely answer is that they're out there somewhere . . . in the hands of selfish people.

Next time: *The Fat Man* starring J. Scott Smart. He tips the scales at 239 pounds. Fortune? Danger!

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By EDGAR BERGEN



Book Review by Jim Maclise

Killer At The Wheel: Carlton E. Morse's First of Five! (Seven Stones Press, Star Route Box 50, Woodside, CA 94062 — \$16.95)

At 86 Carlton E. Morse, a year younger than the century, has become a published novelist with *Killer at the Wheel*, a melodramatic, semi-supernatural thriller which has as much to say about sensational journalism as it does about reckless driving. Neither meets with his approval. In fact, as the story proceeds, a newspaperman's lust for headlines actually contributes to the slaughter on Los Angeles streets and freeways, eventually leading to a cleverly ironic resolution.

Cass Davenport is Morse's protagonist, the fifty-four year old cantankerous, obnoxious, trigger-temperd, lascivious editor of the Los Angeles *Chronicle*. "His favorite words were four letters and his favorite stories were unprintable. He had a bloodhound's nose for news and a satanic instinct for the sensational." He also has both a wife and a mistress, the latter being "the city's hottest bump and grind artist and star stripper." (Don't get your hopes up; we never really meet her.) One particular pre-1950 December, Cass senses a great opportunity to surpass the rival *Tribune* in circulation by giving page one publicity to the wold prophetic ravings of Asa Brown, a local preacher. Brown predicts the deaths of the best-loved of any reckless driver guilty of manslaughter. Furthermore, the innocent victim or victims will be resurrected, restored to life at the moment that the driver's beloved one drops dead. And through editor Davenport's efforts, the *Chronicle* gears this story up to such a fever pitch that half of Los Angeles is in a

genuine panic by January 1, the date on which Brown's prophecy is to take effect and continue for forty-nine days.

While we the readers join Los Angeles in the suspenseful awaiting of the prophecy's onset, we meet a dozen or more characters, including title insurance tycoon James McCutcheon, Chronicle owner Edith Masterson (rich, elderly and selfish) and her spoiled son Edgar, plus professor of English and critic of Madison Avenue propaganda Charles Morton, traffic officer Jess McCann, and other denizens of L.A. Morse makes certain that we also learn who the best beloved is of each of these minor characters in preparation for the working out of Reverend Brown's prediction and the motor vehicle slaughter to come.

Anyone familiar with Carlton Morse's *Love A Mystery* serials known what a clever plot manipulator he is, so it will come as no surprise that his skill in this area is obvious in *Killer at the Wheel*. Additionally, his ability to tantalize us with supernatural overtones which can nevertheless be dissipated by something approaching rational explanation is also well known. (Just consider those vampires in the temple, the werewolves in *Bury Your Dead*, Arizona; the nursery rhyme wallpaper figures in "The Thing that Cried in the Night," or the curse on Sunny Richard. All neatly explained away, right? Right? Yes, I see what you mean.) One of the main pleasures of this new story is awaiting the first fatal accident of the New Year, then trying to outguess Morse regarding how those resurrections and new deaths (those best-beloved replacements) are going to occur and be explained rationally. (One set of victims is burned beyond

resurrection. Excuse me, I meant recognition!)

Several passages make clear that Morse is not entirely pleased with our century. For example: "Of all the diseased expressions of such human insanity, the one ever-present and most indicative is the wanton wail of police, ambulance and fire sirens. Here is the wordless stridor of a jaded people, unable to find sufficient vehemence in their own mouths! In their frustration they have contrived to concentrate all their souls' agony in these monstrous mechanical horrors. To hear a prowler car, ambulance and fire truck in concert on a midnight is to hear the sounds of Hell in full flood, frothing and mad . . . Still we have the satisfaction of knowing that when the time comes, man will not be consumed in silence,

knowing that when the time comes, man will not be consumed in silence, but will go up in flames and atomic smoke, protesting with the wildest wails from brass throats and cast-iron lungs; which should penetrate the innermost walls of Heaven." Anyone still have doubts that Morse can write? Thought it was William Faulkner, didn't you?

Currently Carlton E. Morse has released a second novel, *A Lavish of Sin*, a murder story set in Montana. Yet to come are two Jack, Doc and Reggie adventures titled *The Widow with the Amputation* and *Stuff the Lady's Hatbox*. Neither appeared on *I Love a Mystery*, so they're something new for fans to anticipate. I plan to own them both the minute they appear, and I suggest you do likewise. Meanwhile read *Killer at the Wheel*, but not while driving.

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Crooks, Thieves, Liars and finally the Good Guys by Edward Carr

Nice title, sorry but that's the way I feel. This column has been building up inside me for quite awhile and I can not contain it any longer. So give me a chance. At least I can get some of the frustration out. I mean I am the horse's ass I'll be talking about.

Have you ever been taken, it doesn't have to be a large amount, really, not even money, it could have been tapes you lent out, and never received back, or if you did, they were not the originals, or you want to talk money how about tapes you ordered and never . . . Oh!—that's an old one, okay. But you get the idea.

Well I am going to be the story teller here, and everything here is the absolute truth. I have names, but for now I'll hold them back, not that I hope to retrieve anything, no way, what's lost stays that way, but because I feel it wouldn't be prudent at this time, but that time may be closer than they think.

A blind fellow calls me up a few years ago and asks me do I have any transcriptions for sale, namely Boston Blackie, Cisco Kid, and I tell him I've sold all to a fellow in California. Well we talk awhile and at one point I ask him how he got my name, he tells me. Oh! sure, nice guy. So I offer him a deal. I'll send him the transcriptions, he's to copy them and forward them on to the fellow in California. He agrees and asks me what can he give me in return. Make me copies of this other collection he has. Everything is fine, a few weeks go by and the fellow out west wants to know where are the transcriptions. Bottom line, the guy in the middle says they were lost in a mail robbery and he lost the insurance receipt and I am out around \$300. He never to this day even

offered to pay for them.

Two stories about Kentucky. One day this businessman calls or writes I forget which and wants to know if I trade radio guides. Sure, at that time I had been trying to get complete runs, so I go through mine send him my doubles and wait. Finally a large package arrives with my radio guides, but wait, what's this, a note? My Mother is sick and I didn't have time to go through everything. I will send you the rest later. Bottom line, I am still waiting. The part that burns me just as bad, this guy either had a suite or building in his name and when I called him his secretary told me he was too busy to come to the phone. Out about \$150.00, considering I was selling guides at several conventions for \$3.00 each and 50 were lost in the transaction.

Second story. Kentucky again. A fellow borrows 16 Lone Ranger discs with the stipulation I can borrow his 16 in transcriptions. I sent them and received them back in good time, but not once have I ever heard him mention which ones did I want to borrow.

Here's a story. In a round robin trade, I traded about 20 discs and never once laid hands on the transcriptions. I received the first generation tapes though, and the last fellow to get them was to trade me the same amount, however he didn't have 20 that I wanted so he promised to send me a list when he went through the rest two or three years later, (time has a habit of leaving you behind). I still get lists but every time I pick out a number, I only get a few, never all the ones I want. Why? Because he sold the others. I feel I should be taken care of first and after all this time. So here I am and still the trade has yet to

be completed.

Then there, nuts I am getting tired of writing. That story I didn't tell was about 7 discs of Command Performance and California. I also didn't tell the story of tapes sent to California in a loan and that I haven't yet received, not even the ones I loaned them for.

I've lent discs and received them back and haven't ever received the discs I want to copy, so you understand why I am gun shy about doing it anymore. I've been promised discs to copy so many times, but, but...

If I named names I would shock everyone in the hobby. Yes, I would. So called honest people out for what they can get, give me, give me, and as I said in the beginning I am the horse's ass for doing it all because I wanted one of the better sounding collections around. Believe this

or not, I want to make a buck like a lot of you do, but I can't steal or lie for it. I'd rather give it freely and that's a fact.

However, all this shouldn't turn you off or sour you on taking a chance. There are still plenty of good guys/gals out there, and that brings me to the finish. Let's go out on a good note. I am starting to feel better about people and trades. Right now what discs I have left, I am letting two fellows borrow. I still have a few good ones left and they appreciate it. The trades have been working fine and my discs are being returned promptly. I am sorry I don't have all the discs I should have. It would add to their collections. Yes, I am getting things in return, but that's what trading is all about.

As I've said, I will not reveal any names at this time, but also I am not saying I won't in the future.

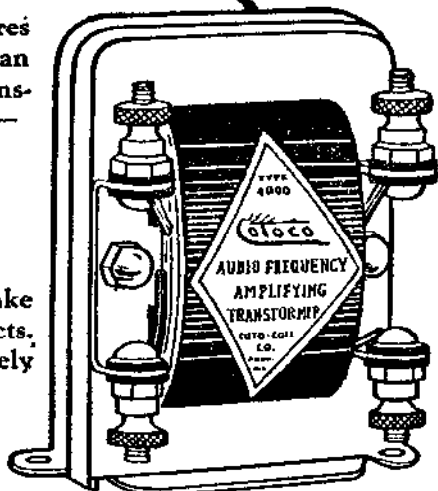
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On cataloguing OTR by George Wagner

When I first began collecting OTR — 'way back in the mid-to-late 1960s — I catalogued my programs by *date* rather than by name. At that time I was more interested in developing a general history of radio broadcasting than in collecting long runs of individual shows. To be more truthful, I didn't then realize that there *were* "long runs" of anything.

My 3" by 5" file cards contained the date and the name of the program. Undated shows I tried to date from internal evidence, and thus many of the cards had very tentative dates like "Spring (?), 1944" or "apparently the last part of August, probably 1952."

About 10 years ago I went through my entire collection and typed up alpha-numeric cards for everything (including all the totally undated stuff). In early 1986 I typed these cards up into a 300-page catalogue. The first supplement, typed in January, 1987, runs another 30-plus pages. This alpha-numeric card file, together with the typed lists, has become the main reference to my collection. The typed catalogue tells me the shows I have, while the matching cards tell me where each show is located — on 5" or 7" reels, on cassettes or eight-tracks, on commercial LPs, on studio or home-recorded audiodiscs, on 16" transcriptions, etc. (I also have a 40-page list for fellow collectors; this contains *most* of the shows listed in the 300-page monstrosity, but gives much less information on each show.)

However, I have *continued* to keep up the date file. For many years this was a thankless task. Then I began noticing that I had two, three or even more shows for many dates. This was especially true for the days on either side of such special

events as Pearl Harbor, D-Day or V-J Day.

These days it is a rare event indeed to file a date card and not find several other programs from that date — at least for the later 1940s and early 1950s. For example, when I recently filed a date card for the BROADWAY IS MY BEAT episode for March 27, 1949, I discovered that I now had no fewer than *six* shows for that same day!

Eventually, I hope to retape shows from each day onto their own special reels, arranged in order of broadcast. I may add my own commentary between shows, such as reading the top news stories from that day's newspaper, etc.



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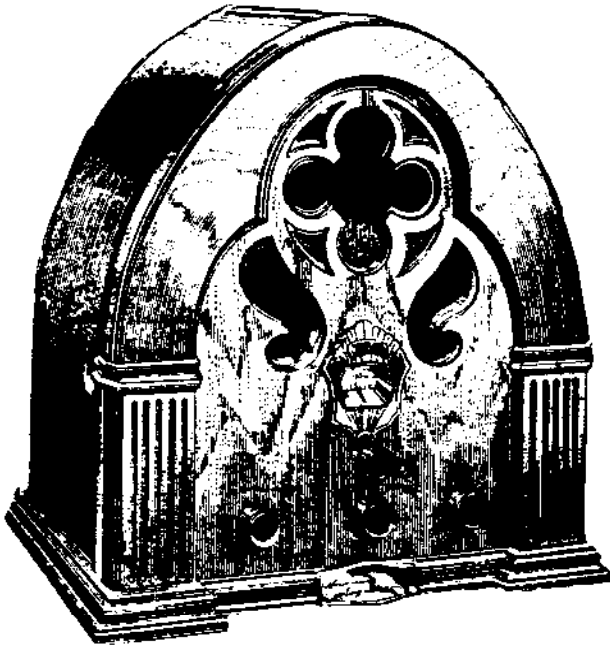
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An OTR ghost story by George Wagner

I don't for a moment insist that the following yarn is true. Even so, the story came along to me as true, and in that spirit I pass the tale along to my fellow OTR collectors. In nearly 30 years of collecting "true" ghost stories, this is the only one I've ever seen that actually involves old time radio.

In the earlier years of radio broadcasting, certainly no later than 1935 and very probably in that year, a young man worked on a cattle ranch in the American Southwest. One of the young ranchhand's chief pleasures was to relax in the bunkhouse at night and listen to the small radio station that broadcast from the county seat. He had fallen quite passionately in love with the voice of the station's female vocalist. She appeared on the air every Thursday evening at nine o'clock, and that hour became the most important in the young man's life.

It took our young rancher many weeks to work up the nerve to write to his radio sweetheart. When he finally did do, his missive was a gushing love letter in which he poured out his heart, hopes and soul to the woman he had often heard but had never seen. He inquired if they might meet. He also requested that she perform his favorite song on the next Thursday's broadcast.

When Thursday evening arrived, the young man's chores kept him away from the radio until 9:00 P.M. By the time he got the set turned on and warmed up, it was 9:02 P.M. He was afraid that he might have missed his song, if it had been the first offering on the program. But no, he had missed only the program opening and the announcer's introduction, for as soon as he sat down to listen, the woman of his dreams began the song he had

waited so long to hear her sing. The words washed over him as if they were warm and soothing waters.

As soon as the final notes of the song died away, however, the station suddenly and totally went off the air.

The young rancher was puzzled by this. If there had been a power failure in town, power to the ranch would have been disrupted as well. In any event, he decided to write another letter to his beloved, thanking her for the song she had sung for him.

A day or two later, a reply arrived from the station.

"We are extremely confused by your recent communication," the station's letter ran. "Surely you must be in error as to the day or even the week of the broadcast you heard? For Miss _____, our talented young vocalist, was killed in a tragic automobile accident Wednesday night. In tribute to her, we took the station off the air, and did not resume broadcasting until Friday morning."

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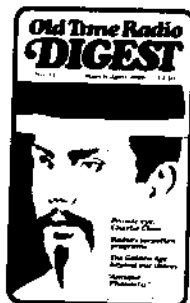
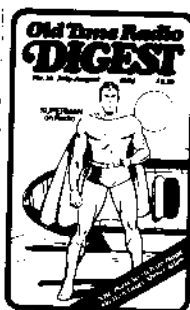
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Inside RADIO

Reunion

FIBBER MCGEE and MOLLY were together again for a short time this week, their first reunion since the show moved to the West Coast. Molly, who is still recuperating from a long illness, was moved to Palm Springs so Fibber could visit her over weekends. It won't be long, now, before she's well enough to rejoin her husband's broadcasts.

Orchids

RED SKELTON earns the gratitude of civic-minded Cincinnatians this week by giving up an hour between broadcasts of "Avalon Time" to m.c. the Community Chest Show which stations WKRC, WCPO, WCKY and WSAI will put on in round-robin form, April 15.



Red Skelton

Skelton isn't the only one, however, who deserves praise in this connection. We sat in on the planning of the full hour show, noted the beautiful cooperation among the stations, who are, by nature of the radio business, competi-

tors, and their generosity, not only in donating time and talent to the community cause, but also in going to no end of trouble to arrange the thing, mechanically—not an easy feat, nor a cheap one.

So—an orchid to Skelton, the stations and the talent participating in the Community Chest Show.

No Scandal

MERCEDES M C C A M-B R I D G E brags that once she rode nearly all the way to Texas on GENERAL JOHN G. PERSHING'S lap. The scandal-mongers need not prick up their ears, however. The NBC actress was only two years old when it happened.



Man Bites Dog

When JOHNNY GREEN revealed that he will become a daddy in September, the boys in the band reversed the procedure and gave *him* a box of cigars! The prospective mama's maiden name was BETTY FURNESS—well known to movie fans.

Substitute

Ever since PATSY KELLY can remember, she's wanted to go to Ireland to kiss the Blarney Stone. As a matter of fact, the Blarney Stone was to Patsy what Mecca is to the Mohammedan. But at first she was too broke to make the trip and ever since she got started in the movies, she's been too busy. However, a few months ago, the big moment came.



Patsy Kelly

"At last—a vacation," breathed Patsy. "To Ireland for me!" And right then she was signed up for the BOB HOPE show, so the trip was off again.

Some kind Irish hearts were touched, however, when the tale of Patsy's disappointment got around. They sent her a bit of the stone itself. Now Patsy wears it in a charm bracelet and she can kiss the Blarney Stone as often as she likes.

Chatter

Exercising his legal training, PETER GRANT, the newscaster, speaks before the Council of Jewish Women on the "Bill of Rights," April 19. . . . DON WILSON has a unique system of race betting. He buys a program, closes his eyes, and jabs with his pencil. P. S.—He rarely wins. . . . LARRY CLINTON is jamming them in wherever he goes on that tour. . . . HARRY SLATER takes over the

baton on the PHIL BAKER show April 15. . . . DOLORES (cry-baby) GILLEN came back to the Mary Marlin cast from Florida with a coat of tan and a black eye, the latter a souvenir from an automobile accident on the return trip. . . . MARY EASTMAN, "Saturday Night Sere-nade" vocalist, humming "Hold Tight" in a CBS elevator, with symphony leader HOWARD BARLOW joining in for a "hot" chorus.

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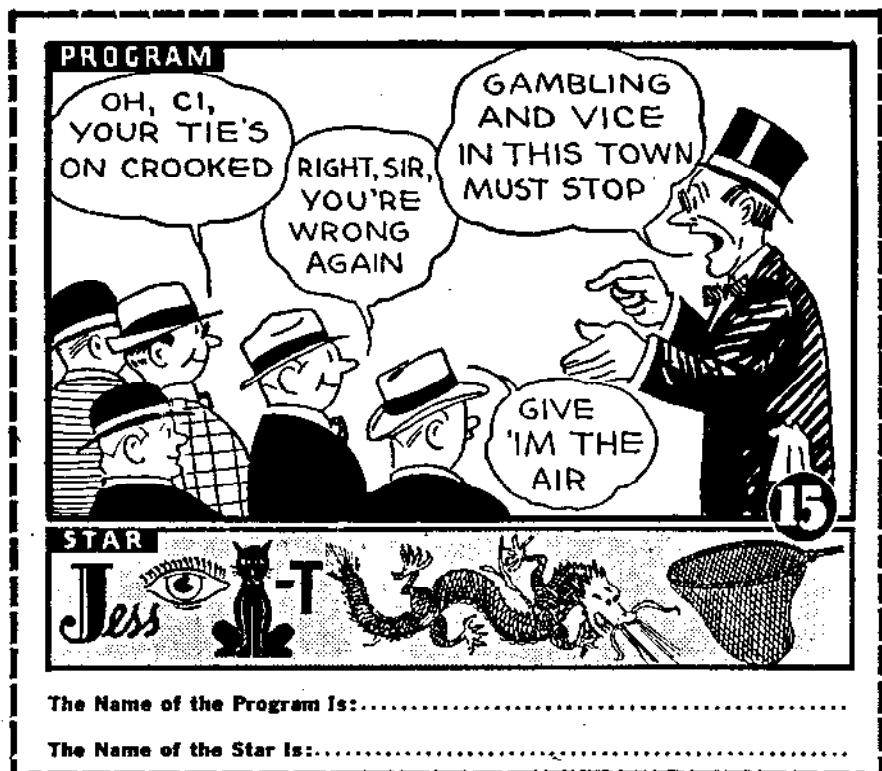
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