

Back Into the "ZONE"

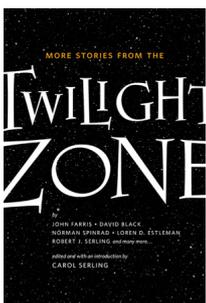
Written by Nick Masercola
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THE TWILIGHT ZONE. In the 20th century, there has probably been nothing more integral to the development of science fiction and horror television as a legitimate storytelling medium than this show. One of the few genre ventures to be overwhelmingly embraced by critics and audiences alike, Rod Serling's classic anthology series is truly one-of-a-kind. Unfortunately, so was the man, and after his death, no revival of the show has ever managed to match its initial greatness. Until now.

The legacy of THE TWILIGHT ZONE carries on with his wife, editor Carol Serling (pictured), who put together MORE STORIES FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE (recently published by Tor Books), a collection of 19 original works inspired by the classic program. And if there's one person who understands the show's magic and its legacy, it would be Rod's toughest critic and closest companion, and now the bearer of the TWILIGHT ZONE legacy.

"I worked with a company that I've been involved with before on other books," she says. "There was STORIES FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE for the—believe it or not—50th anniversary of the program, and this is the follow-up. I worked with Marty Greenberg, and we wrote out...I guess you could say 'invitational letters' to various authors to see if they could contribute a story, and a lot of them answered back. We turned down a few, but by and large they were super. I believe they're very diverse and reminiscent of the series, and I'm really happy with them."



But just what makes something a TWILIGHT ZONE story? "I think it's extraordinary things happening to ordinary people," she explains. "The producer of the series, Buck Houghton, used to say you could only have one crazy thing happen, not a bunch. It's speculative fiction that challenges your perception of reality, of what could be, but you can wrap your head around it. It challenges your ideas, but it's not that far-out—it's not crazy green monsters from outer space."

Famous not only for their standout writing and surprising twists, many of the best TWILIGHT

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ZONE episodes also carried a moral agenda or challenging idea mixed with great entertainment, something which the stories in this compilation also share. "Think of AVATAR," Serling says. "I mean, you could see that it was about the destruction of the environment and what we do to our planet, or you could just see it as a good adventure, and that's true of THE TWILIGHT ZONE. Young kids who might not have gotten the moral imperatives of these stories enjoyed them because they were entertaining. And a lot of the stories in the new book do have a...I hate to say the word 'message,' but you know what I mean."

And the tales in this collection are a truly wonderful bunch, living up to the high standards set by the show. "It was really a labor of love for me to do this book—I thoroughly enjoyed compiling these stories," Serling says. "They're fascinating, and their creators are not just your run-of-the-mill authors; they've labored in the vineyard for a long time and are recognizable names. One of the entries is by Rod's brother Robert, who's also a writer, and it's a good story. There's also an original work of Rod's that was never published before, which was fun too. There's [Kristine Kathryn Rusch's] 'Last Christmas Letter,' which I absolutely love. The Nancy Holder story ["By the Book"] about a harried housewife is great, [David Gerrold's] "Sales of a Deathman"—they're all wonderful. And there are one or two that are kind of creepy. Most people found the show creepy, which I never got. A couple of episodes like the Talky Tina one were, but not the whole show."

Yet THE TWILIGHT ZONE continues to live on the public imagination, though Carol doesn't believe even her late husband thought THE TWILIGHT ZONE would ever become as revered and long-lasting as it has. "Rod has been gone many, many years, but he'd be so surprised it's still around. Actually, it has never been off the air in all these 50 years. The marathons keep going on, and it has become a catchphrase: 'The Twilight Zone' is actually in the dictionary now!" she laughs. "I'm sure he would never guess it would be still around and important now."

Unfortunately, though that particular series has remained important, Carol believes Rod would believe the medium itself has not. "It has faltered so much," she says. "It's just pure crap on now with the reality shows. There are still glimmers of hope like the Discovery Channel and some specials, but he thought television could be an art form, and I don't think he'd see that now. He felt that it's out there to entertain you, but also had the potential to educate, and it sure as hell isn't doing that. Honestly, I think he'd be very disappointed."

Nonetheless, if the new book is any indication, the TWILIGHT ZONE legacy is still holding strong, and Carol reveals she's working on further preserving the famed saga in print. "I'm still working on a series called AS TIMELESS AS INFINITY," she reveals. "We're publishing all of Rod's scripts, and when we're finished there will be 10 volumes containing 92 of his teleplays,

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and it's the originals we're printing. It's fun. We'll have comments and remarks from people involved in the series, plus photographs. It's great fun, and they're good books. I'm very happy with the series; I would have paid this publisher to do it, but luckily I didn't have to!"

And what of another film adaptation? Warner Bros. and Leonardo DiCaprio's Appian Way company have announced plans to bring THE TWILIGHT ZONE back to the big screen, and Carol says, "It's very likely that there may be another movie, but I don't know anything specific at this point. I have heard that DiCaprio was enamored of the series and is trying to drum up some interest." With a show that has captivated fans for over 50 years, it's unlikely he'll have much trouble.

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