

Written by Trevor Parker

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If there's a lesson to be gleaned from the dozens of inane slasher sequels we're all guilty of enjoying, it's that nothing ever really dies. Take the scripted audio drama, for example. For most people, radio drama is an antiquated relic that winked out around the same time hula hoops and car fins began to vanish. A few minor revivals have come and gone over the ensuing decades, but thanks to the Internet, the form now seems to finally be climbing all the way out of its grave.

Scores of websites exist to house catalogs of classic mystery and suspense radio programs (such as the venerable INNER SANCTUM), and with this easy access, a growing number of the iPod generation have begun to appreciate audio drama as a unique and still-viable artistic medium unto itself. Glass Eye Pix generalissimo Larry Fessenden and cohort Glenn McQuaid share this burgeoning affection for creepy old-time radio gems, and are overseeing their own original take with the TALES FROM BEYOND THE PALE web series. With features like THE HOUSE OF THE DEVIL and the upcoming STAKE LAND, Glass Eye is building a serious rep in the film world for quality artistic productions, and thus expectations were pretty darn high as Fango plugged its earphones into its new single-sensory venture.



The first TALE on offer is “Man on the Ledge,” from writer/director Joe Maggio of the Glass Eye feature BITTER FEAST. The episode kicks off with Fessenden serving as host for the proceedings, a welcome touch of nostalgia for those familiar with “Raymond” or other bygone masters of ceremonies. Fessenden-as-host is classily restrained in these segments, only indulging in a single customary horror-host pun once the dramatic portion of the show has ended.

After introductions are made, the tale begins and listeners are transported to a 10th-floor building ledge in New York City. John Alba (Vincent D’Onofrio) has a rambling

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stream-of-consciousness monologue to share while standing out there, and to spill any more detail would spoil the crafty reveals contained within the compact, 33-minute play.

“Man on the Ledge” occasionally comes across as padded, with several long stretches of existential blather, but is ultimately a very satisfying launch to the series. Its setup-and-twist arrangement recalls the best of classic radio (excepting the modern, saltier language, of course). Mention must be made of the exceptional performances; the material is enlivened by the superb D’Onofrio (from *FULL METAL JACKET*, *MEN IN BLACK* et al.), whose stuttering, naturalistic voice acting is completely gripping. Even the greatest of the old-time shows suffer from what in 2010 feels like stagy and overly deliberate delivery by classically trained casts; here, D’Onofrio manages to make audio drama feel fresh again with every subtle inflection. He’s ably supported by Fessenden’s reappearance as part of the tale, reprising his *FEAST* role of private eye Bill Coley.



The second episode is filmmaker Simon Rumley’s “British and Proud,” and here things start to diverge from the old-time blueprint. Sebastian is an Englishman troubled by odd dreams on the eve of his wedding to Zalika, a young lady of African origin. The couple decide to spend their honeymoon visiting Zalika’s isolated African homestead, where his new in-laws seem suspiciously overjoyed to meet their new British relation.

Rumley has been receiving strong notices for his revenge film *RED, WHITE & BLUE* as it makes the festival rounds, and with this story, he bravely delves into touchy thematic terrain by bringing up volatile issues like immigration and citizenship. His film background soon becomes evident through his use of intentionally abrupt editing, giving this installment a very disorienting, off-kilter tone. The quick cuts and caffeinated pacing require all of the listener’s focus in order to follow along—which is not necessarily a demerit, but some may find themselves needing to rewind a few times to catch back up with the story. Also, brace yourselves for both a squishy gore moment and a aural sex scene, both highly disturbing.

While the acting is uneven when compared to the standard set by the previous entry, and the

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story confusingly introduces and then discards a supernatural dream element, it’s still another overall strong showing.

If these first two installments are any indication, listeners can expect wildly different approaches and unpredictable flavors housed between Fessenden’s host bumpers as TALES FROM BEYOND THE PALE continues its first season (Sarah Langan’s “Is This Seat Taken?” is the most recent to be posted). The format requires a bit more effort to enjoy than the visual media we’re used to; a flexing of atrophied imagination is needed to dispel the brain’s reflex image of two guys holding script pages in front of microphones. Fango promises the effort will be rewarded with deft storytelling, involving atmospherics and an outstanding way to kill a subway ride. The reasonable pricing is a huge win as well, at \$1.99 per episode download from the [official website](#)

. When you consider that, say, the latest Ke\$ha abomination would run you \$1.29 at the iTunes store, the fun and spooky TALES FROM BEYOND THE PALE is one hell of a bargain.

“Man on the Ledge”: 🍊🍊🍊🍊

“British and Proud”: 🍊🍊🍊👤