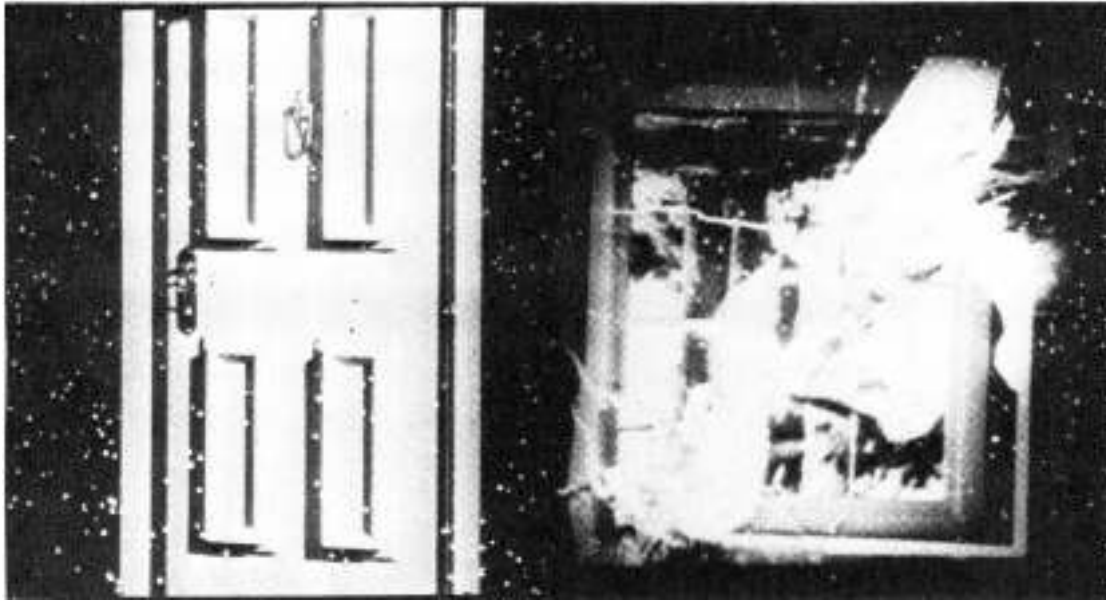


BY MARC SCOTT ZIGREE

THE TWILIGHT ZONE COMPANION

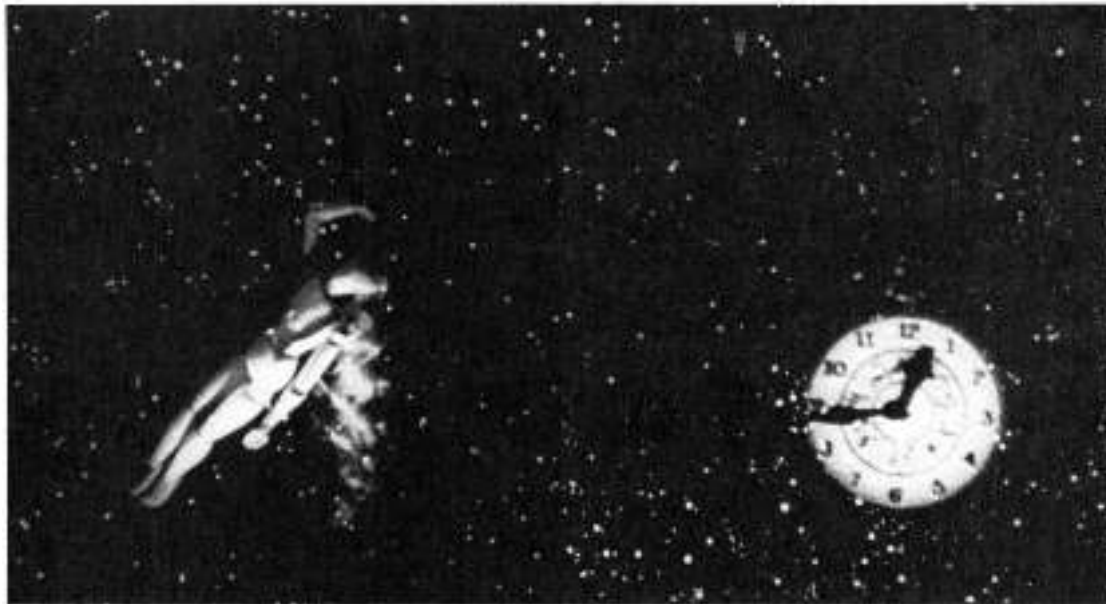
THE COMPLETE SHOW-BY-SHOW GUIDE
TO ONE OF THE GREATEST TELEVISION SERIES EVER.

THE TWILIGHT ZONE COMPANION



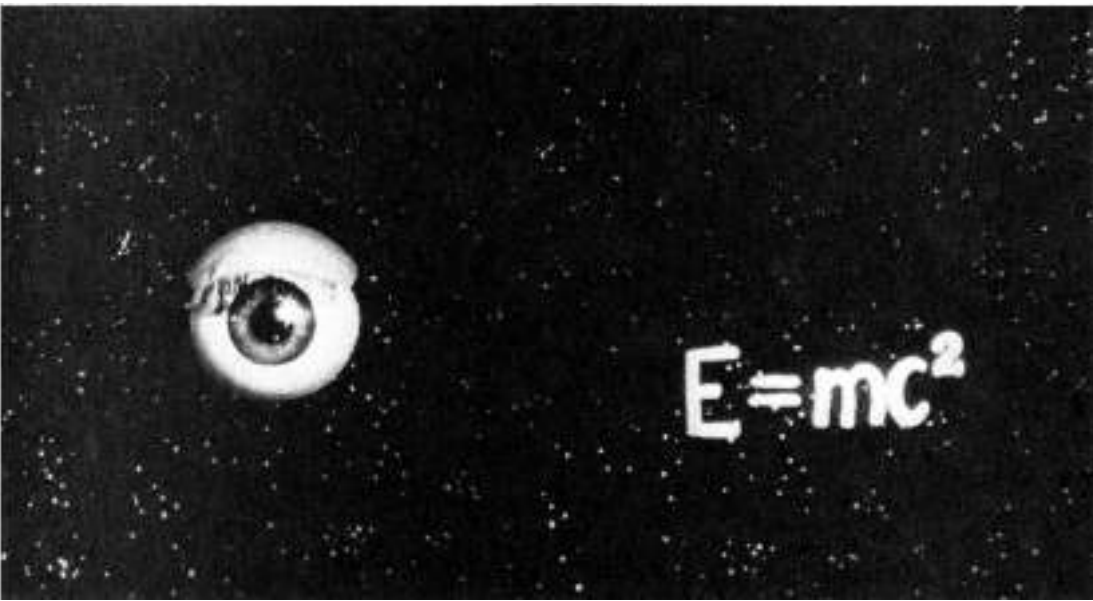
"You unlock this door with the key of
imagination. Beyond it is another dimension . . .

. . . a dimension of sound . . .



. . . You're moving into a land
of both shadow and substance . . .

. . . of things and ideas . . .



... a dimension of sight ...

... a dimension of mind ...



... You've just crossed over ...

... into the Twilight Zone.''

THE TWILIGHT COM



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GHT ZONE PANION

BY MARC SCOTT ZICREE

THE TWILIGHT ZONE COMPANION

A Bantam Book/December 1982

Book designed by Renée Gelman.

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To Gloria Zicree,
mother and true friend

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lege School of Communications.

“This highway leads to the shadowy tip of reality; you’re on a through route to the land of the different, the bizarre, the unexplainable . . . Go as far as you like on this road. Its limits are only those of the mind itself. Ladies and gentlemen, you’re entering the wondrous dimension of imagination. Next stop—*THE TWILIGHT ZONE.*”

—*Twilight Zone opening by Rod Serling; never used.*

INTRODUCTION

If you've bought this book, or if you're reading this introduction in a bookstore, you are reading it for one reason and one reason only: Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* entertained you, touched you, and left its mark. You are not alone in this. During its original five-year run on CBS from 1959 to 1964, *The Twilight Zone* attracted an average weekly audience of close to eighteen million people, and since then the numbers that have watched it in syndication have added countless millions more.

When *The Twilight Zone* debuted in 1959, it was a flower blooming in a television desert, made vacant by an endless number of situation comedies, westerns, and cop shows. To its faithful viewers, *The Twilight Zone* offered far more than empty laughs or a lesson in urban or frontier justice. Instead, at its best, it lived up to the promise of its opening narration, revealing a vista of realities not weighed down by the merely probable. At a time when the rest of television was hammering home the unstated but nonetheless apparent message that the realities and expectations of life were bracketed within very narrow borders, *The Twilight Zone* presented a universe of possibilities and options. Most importantly, with few exceptions the characters inhabiting *The Twilight Zone* were average, ordinary people: bank clerks, teachers, petty hoods, salesmen, executives on the rise or decline. It took no great leap for us to identify ourselves with these frail and vulnerable souls and imagine that perhaps in some flight of fancy, some slight tangent from the reality of the ordinary routine, what happened to these characters might very well happen to us.

In the next several hundred pages, we will look behind the magician's curtain, peek into the top hats and under the tables, and learn all the secrets. With minor magic tricks, revelation brings only disappointment, but with luck, examination of *The Twilight Zone*'s grander wizardry will bring greater understanding and appreciation of the intricacies behind the art. The first object of our scrutiny will be the Grand Sorcerer of the Twilight Zone himself, master of ceremonies and principal sleight-of-hand artist. Ladies and gentlemen . . . Mr. Rod Serling.

I / ROD SERLING

If the name Rod Serling were to pop up in some nationwide word association test, virtually everyone in America would venture the automatic response, “*The Twilight Zone*,” such is the degree to which Serling’s name is attached to his creation. But during the 1950s, prior to *The Twilight Zone*, Serling’s name summoned up references of an entirely different nature. He was counted one of a small, elite group of young and innovative writers, among them Paddy Chayefsky and Reginald Rose, whose works were defining television as a dramatic art form, one with a realism surpassing movies and an immediacy rivalling the stage. To public and press alike, Serling was viewed as video’s equivalent of Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams. One commentator even compared him to Sophocles.



Rod Serling

Given this, it came as quite a shock when Serling announced in 1959 that he was going to devote all his energies to a weekly series of science-fiction and fantasy stories.

“To go from writing an occasional drama for *Playhouse 90*, a distinguished and certainly important series, to creating and writing a weekly, thirty-minute television film,” he conceded, “was like Stan Musial leaving St. Louis to coach third base in an American Legion little league.”

Worse than the change in length, however, was the seemingly 180-degree shift in subject matter. It was as though Serling were saying that he was going to stop commenting on the human condition and go play in a field of daisies. To many, science fiction was considered three notches below graffiti in terms of literary importance. During an interview with Serling on September 22, 1959, TV newsman Mike Wallace said, “. . . [Y]ou’re going to be, obviously, working so hard on *The Twilight Zone* that, in essence, for the time being and for the foreseeable future, you’ve given up on writing anything important for television, right?”

At the time, Serling’s harshest critics made the assumption that *The Twilight Zone* was not only a step down but a choice made entirely out of the blue. To any astute observer, however, his decision should have come as no surprise, for it was a totally logical and predictable progression in his career. Like an Agatha Christie mystery, clues leading to Rod Serling’s involvement in *The Twilight Zone* were sprinkled throughout his youth and early works.

Rodman Edward Serling was born in Syracuse, New York, on December 25, 1924 (“I was a Christmas present that was delivered unwrapped,” he later said). Shortly thereafter, Rod and his family—his brother Robert, seven years his senior, and his parents, Samuel Lawrence Serling, a wholesale meat dealer, and Esther Cooper Serling—moved to Binghamton, a small city in upstate New York where, throughout his childhood, Rod’s imagination and creativity were allowed to flourish.

“He was about the greatest extrovert you could ever hope for,” says Bob Serling, now a successful novelist (*The President’s Plane Is Missing*). “He was a good-looking kid and he knew it. Very popular, very articulate, very outspoken. He had no arrogance—it was confidence. There was a hell of a difference.

“We were fairly close as kids and we played together a hell of a lot, despite the seven-year difference. The two of us used to read *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Stories*, *Weird Tales*—all of the pulps. If we saw a movie together, we’d come home and act it out, just for the two of us. Our bikes became airplanes with machine guns on them. We were always playing cowboys.”



Rod Serling, his mother and father

Rod was not bookish by any means; he was outgoing, enthusiastic, loved to be center stage. “His mouth was hinged open like the front end of a steam shovel running amok,” Bob Serling recalls. “The big treat for the family was to drive from Binghamton to Syracuse, which was seventy miles away, and my father once tipped us off that nobody was to say a word from the start of the trip *until Rod stopped talking*. Now, in those days it took approximately two and a half hours to drive the seventy miles and, so help me, he never stopped talking from the time he got into the car to the time we arrived in Syracuse. My mother and father were in absolute hysterics. He must have been six or seven years old. He was in a world all by himself. He’d sing, he’d act out dialogue, he’d talk to us without waiting for answers. He just kept talking.

“He was that way all through school, that I can remember. A class leader, always into dramatics. He’d try out for anything. There was some kind of compulsion in him to do something that nobody else—the ordinary kid—wouldn’t do. And this included joining the paratroopers in World War II. He was a damn fool to do it.”

The day he graduated high school, Rod enlisted in the U.S. Army 11th Airborne Division paratroopers. During basic training, he took up boxing for extra pay and privileges, winning seventeen out of eighteen bouts.

Following basic training, he was sent into combat in the Pacific. In 1945, while Rod was fighting in the Philippines, his father died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-two. When Rod was finally able to return to Binghamton, it was to a home lacking forever the security and stability he had known as a child.

Without World War II, there is no way of knowing whether or not Serling would have become a writer, but the war both broadened his experience and placed an emotional pressure on him that demanded catharsis. "I had been injured with the paratroopers [a severe shrapnel wound in the wrist and knee requiring hospitalization] and I was bitter about everything and at loose ends when I got out of the service. I think I turned to writing to get it off my chest."

Upon his discharge from the Army in 1946, Rod enrolled at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, on the G.I. Bill. "I really didn't know what the hell I wanted to do with my life, but I went to Antioch because my brother [had gone] there. I majored in physical ed that first year because I was interested in working with kids." But physical education couldn't fill the pressing need he had for self-expression. He soon changed his major to language and literature. During the war he had written scripts for Armed Services Radio, as well as lots of bad poetry. Now radio seemed the ideal medium. He became manager of the Antioch Broadcasting System's radio workshop and wrote, directed and acted in weekly, full-scale productions which were broadcast over radio WJEM, Springfield. During the 1948-49 school year, the entire output of the workshop was written by Serling, and, with the exception of one adaptation, all the scripts were entirely original. Later, he would call this work "pretty bad stuff," adding, "Style is something you develop by copying the style of someone who writes well. For a while you're a cheap imitation. I was a Hemingway imitator. Everything I wrote began, 'It was hot.'" However, he was getting invaluable training and discipline, plus his first taste of practical business matters: every script he wrote he mailed out to at least one national radio show for consideration.

In the fall of 1946, Rod met Carolyn Louise Kramer, a strikingly attractive, articulate, no-nonsense young lady of seventeen, majoring in

The Serling family



education and psychology. Serling was twenty-one. Says Carol of their first meeting, "He struck me as being very intelligent, with a wonderful sense of humor. And there was something about him that fascinated me. I had never met anyone who was as self-assured before."

Initially, Carol was a little wary of Rod. "He had the reputation at Antioch College of being quite a ladies' man," she recalls. "He had dated just about every other girl in the school before he got to me." Soon it became clear to both that theirs was more than just a passing college romance. In the summer of 1948, the two were married. It was a marriage that would last until Serling's death twenty-seven years later.

Marriage did little to tone Serling down. If anything, the emotional security of a wife increased his creativity and his determination to succeed. Also undiminished was his often outrageous sense of humor.

Carol Serling: "I remember one time it was dark and we were in a trailer which had two hatches in the top which could be opened to let in fresh air. I had to go out for a moment and when I returned Rod had disappeared. Then I looked up and there was this head hanging through the open hatch. In the darkness of the trailer it looked horrible and I screamed.

"It was Rod hanging upside down on top of the trailer . . . He got stuck in the hatch and friends had to free him. I thought he really deserved it."

Serling's first big break came on March 16, 1949, while he was still a college student. *Dr. Christian*, a radio show that obtained all its scripts through an annual contest (its slogan was "the only show on radio where the audience writes the scripts") sent him a telegram informing him that his script, "To Live a Dream," had won second prize. "The prizes included five hundred dollars cash and an all-expense-paid trip to New York for me and Carol," Serling recalled. "By the time we were dizzily installed in a big suite of rooms in a plush midtown hotel I felt like Norman Corwin!" Carol Serling noted, "The college newspaper ran a story about it with a headline that said, 'Serling Goes to Christian Reward.'"

"To Live a Dream," was about a prizefighter slowly dying of leukemia who keeps a stiff upper lip while starting a younger fighter on the road to the top. That same year, Rod sold two radio scripts to *Grand Central Station*, and the following year, his first television script, "Grady Everett for the People," to *Stars Over Hollywood* for one hundred dollars.

Upon graduation, Rod and Carol moved to Cincinnati, where Rod got a job as a staff writer with WLW radio. His duties, though numerous, were less than fulfilling. He provided folksy banter for two entertainers he described as "a hayseed M.C. who strummed a guitar and said 'Shucks, friends,' and a girl yodeler whose falsetto could break a beer mug at twenty paces." He composed phony testimonials for a patent medicine remedy

(“It had about twelve percent alcohol by volume and, if the testimonials were to be believed, could cure everything from arthritis to a fractured pelvis”). He wrote documentaries honoring local towns, of which he said: “In most cases, the towns I was assigned to honor had little to distinguish them save antiquity. Any dramatization beyond the fact that they existed physically, usually had one major industry, a population and a founding date was more fabrication than documentation.”

Rod was desperate to break away from this and devote all his energies to writing things he sincerely cared about, but at the same time he was a married man with responsibilities. At best, freelance writing was a tremendous financial risk, one he was extremely hesitant to take. So, for a short time, his schedule went like this: write all day at WLW, come home, have dinner and write all evening on his own projects. “It was during this double-shift period that I collected forty rejection slips in a row. Nobody but a beginning writer can realize just how crushing this is to the ego.”

Clearly, this was an impossible situation. “The process of writing cannot be juggled with another occupation,” Serling wrote in 1957. “Writing is a demanding profession and a selfish one. And because it is selfish and demanding, because it is compulsive and exacting, I didn’t embrace it. I succumbed to it.” Rod quit his job at WLW. “For lush or lean, good or bad, Sardi’s or malnutrition, I’d launched a career.”

Fortunately for Serling, his timing couldn’t have been better. In 1951, television was much easier to break into than it is today. Today, there are virtually no anthology shows, but in 1951 they were all over the dial. If one show rejected his script, Rod could send it, with no changes whatsoever, to another. During his first year freelancing, he earned just under \$5,000, selling scripts to such shows as *Hallmark Hall of Fame*, *Lux Video Theater*, *Kraft Television Theater*, *Suspense*, and *Studio One*. It was hard work, but it was a living—and Serling was his own man.

A lot of these early scripts were rough, underdeveloped, hurried; some, admittedly, were still “pretty bad stuff.” But to be fair, it should be said that if they were bad at least they were bad in the right direction. A quality which could be seen in these scripts, even as it can be seen in Serling’s later scripts for *The Twilight Zone*, was that even the worst of them revealed a primary concern for people and their problems. Sometimes the situations were clichéd, the characters two-dimensional, but always there was at least some search for an emotional truth, some attempt to make a statement on the human condition.

Needless to say, this is *not* what most television concerned itself with in the early fifties (or today, for that matter). For example, take this television guide from the Cincinnati *Times-Star* of November 12, 1953, reprinted verbatim. These program listings include time and channel, and were listed under the heading *DRAMA*:

-
- 6:30 12—Superman’s secret identity is threatened by a gangster’s dog.
- 7:00 9—Captain Video advises Rangers to blast at full space speed.
- 7:30 9—Tom Conway stars as Inspector Mark Saber.
- 8:00 5—Joan complicates Brad’s hobby of collecting tropical fish.
- 8:30 9—Colonel Flack outswindles a tout at the racetrack.
- 8:30 5—“My Little Margie” causes “A Slight Misunderstanding” worth \$35,000.
- 9:00 5—Cincinnatian Rod Serling’s “A Long Time Till Dawn”, story of tumultuous conflict in a young poet, is produced.

Given this kind of comparison, it’s easy to see why young Serling, only twenty-eight in 1953, quickly gained the notice of both the public and a number of television critics.

James Dean in “A Long Time Till Dawn”





Rod Serling

On Wednesday, January 12, 1955, *Kraft Television Theater* presented Serling's seventy-second television script. To Rod and Carol, at the time, the script seemed little different from the seventy-one before it and they expected it to receive no greater reaction. Says Carol of that evening, "I remember that we had some business to do in upstate New York—we were living in Connecticut—and we got a babysitter for our daughter, Jodi, and said, 'We just moved into Connecticut. No one will call us, nothing will happen.' And while we were in upstate New York, the show was on."

The name of the show was "Patterns."

“One minute after the show went off the air my phone started to ring,” Serling said seven years later. “It’s been ringing ever since.”

“Patterns” dramatized a struggle for power involving three men: Ramsey, the ruthless president of a major corporation (superbly played by Everett Sloane); Andy Sloane (Ed Begley), the aging vice-president Ramsey wants to pressure into resigning; and Fred Staples (Richard Kiley), the unwitting but basically decent young hotshot brought in to replace Andy. It was simple, direct, and tremendously powerful. The reaction to it was overwhelming.

“Nothing in months has excited the television industry as much as the Kraft Television Theater’s production of ‘Patterns’, an original play by Rod Serling,” Jack Gould wrote in the *New York Times*. “The enthusiasm is justified. In writing, acting, and direction, ‘Patterns’ will stand as one of the high points in the TV medium’s evolution. . . . For sheer power of narrative, forcefulness of characterization and brilliant climax, Mr. Serling’s work is a creative triumph that can stand on its own.” Gould’s reaction was typical. From coast to coast, newspaper critics hailed Serling a brilliant new find.

On February 9, 1955, a little under a month after the original broadcast, “Patterns” was again performed live, by popular demand. This was unprecedented. On March 17, 1956, “Patterns” won for Serling the first of what would eventually be six Emmys. And on March 27, 1956, a little over a year after the initial airing, the movie version of “Patterns” was released. It was directed by Fielder Cook, who had directed the television show, and starred Everett Sloane, Eg Begley, and, in the Kiley role, Van Heflin.

Thanks to “Patterns,” Serling was now a “hot” property. In two weeks after its initial broadcast, he received twenty-three firm offers for television writing assignments, three motion picture offers, fourteen requests for interviews from major newspapers and magazines, two offers of lunch from Broadway producers, and two offers to discuss novels with publishers.

Accordingly, Serling took a lot of these people up on their offers: “. . . I was the hungry kid left all alone in the candy store. Man, I just *grabbed!*” That season alone, he had twenty of his plays telecast, earning him eighty thousand dollars. Most of these scripts were ones he had written in college and just afterward in Cincinnati for a local television program called *The Storm*.

“I found I could sell everything I had—and I did,” Serling said later. “I realize now I was wrong; a lot of them should have stayed in the trunk . . . I had three bad shows on the air in [one] two week period. Not since the British raided Cologne had so many bombs landed in such a small space in such a short time.”

The movie offers were taken up, too. The first script that Serling

worked on was 20th Century-Fox's *Between Heaven and Hell*, which was eventually done by six other writers. Serling: "I turned in a script that would conservatively have run for nine hours on the screen. I think it was about 500 pages long. I didn't know what the hell I was doing. They just said, 'Here's fifteen hundred a week,' and so I just wrote and wrote. I lay claim to the fact that there were some wonderful moments in it—but in nine hours of film, my God, there *has* to be a couple of wonderful moments if a guy just blows his nose!"

Serling wrote a handful of screenplays during this period which were never made, including an adaptation of John Christopher's science fiction novel *No Blade of Grass*. Other than *Patterns*, only one Serling script was produced, a western called *Saddle the Wind*, of which he later said, "I gave better dialogue to the horses than the actors."

This is not to say everything Serling wrote during this period was bad. His screenplay for *Patterns*, in which he expanded his original script from a running time of fifty-three minutes to eighty-four minutes, was skillful and intense. Then, too, there was "The Rack," an hour-long drama on the *United States Steel Hour*, which was an honest and powerful investigation into the after-effects of mental torture on American POWs in Korea (later made into a film starring Paul Newman, with a script by Stewart Stern). But nothing he wrote during the year or so following "Patterns" seemed to have either the same dramatic punch or the power to remain long imbedded in the public mind. This point was driven home to Serling when, during a network interview, he was introduced as "Rod Serling, the man who wrote 'Patterns' and" (a long pause) ". . . and . . . well . . . here he is—Rod Serling."

The pressure was on. "I had something to prove, first to others and then to myself. I had to prove that 'Patterns' wasn't all I had. There had been other things before and there would be other things to follow."

On October 4, 1956, CBS debuted a ninety-minute, weekly series called *Playhouse 90*. The aim of the show was ambitious: to recruit the best actors, writers and directors and to air shows of a quality never before seen on television. In this aim, they were largely successful. Stars on *Playhouse 90* included Paul Muni, Charles Laughton, Melvyn Douglas, Cliff Robertson, Jason Robards, Ethel Barrymore, Shirley Booth, Boris Karloff, Franchot Tone, Geraldine Page and Sterling Hayden. Original presentations included "The Miracle Worker," "Judgment at Nuremberg," and "The Days of Wine and Roses"—all later made into films. Three out of every four shows were to be live, with the fourth on film. Budget was set at \$100,000 per episode.

The first episode was "Forbidden Area," with a script by Serling from a novel by Pat Frank. The cast consisted of Charlton Heston, Vincent Price, and Tab Hunter. If either Serling or the executives behind *Playhouse 90*

expected to have their reputations made by this show, they were quickly disillusioned. The reviews were not glowing, nor should they have been, considering the plot of this Cold War "thriller." Air Force nuclear bombers are mysteriously being blown up in flight. One-eyed Major Charlton Heston suspects sabotage. Ultimately, the enemy within is uncovered. Tab Hunter, a cook in the Strategic Air Command kitchen, has been smuggling bombs inside the coffee Thermoses the bomber pilots have been taking with them on their flights! "It presented a war drama that ran the gamut of hokum," wrote a less-than-enthusiastic Jack Gould in the *New York Times*. "Mr. Serling's script had everything in it but the proverbial kitchen sink." Clearly, this was not the play to top "Patterns."

But as it turned out, the second *Playhouse 90* was.

"Requiem for a Heavyweight," the first original ninety-minute show ever written for television, aired October 11, 1956. An enormously touch-

Keenan Wynn, Jack Palance and Ed Wynn in "Requiem for a Heavyweight"



sample content of The Twilight Zone Companion

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