

CLASSIC CUT

ROD SERLING'S THE TWILIGHT ZONE MAGAZINE

MONTCALM PUBLISHING USA - 1981-1989

Thirty years ago, supermarket shelves were glutted with novels from the likes of Stephen King, Robert R. McCammon and many others. Seeing an opportunity to make a quick buck, skin magazine company Montcalm Publishing launched *Rod Serling's The Twilight Zone Magazine* in 1981. It went on to become one of the most widely read contemporary publications devoted exclusively to horror and fantasy fiction and film. Inadvertently, it also

jump-started the careers of fledgling horror fiction writers, and exposed a whole new generation to veterans of the genre.

Carol Serling, widow of *TZ* series creator Rod Serling, who died in 1975, was brought on board as associate publisher and consulting editor, tackling everything from choosing the fiction the magazine published, to the quality of the paper it was printed on. Moving from monthly to bimonthly in 1983, it proceeded to rack up a who's who of genre names as contributors, thanks in part to the involvement of TV writer Marc Scott Zicree.

His mentor, Theodore Sturgeon (*Killdozer*, *It*), reviewed books early on, while writer/cartoonist Gahan Wilson tackled movies. T.E.D. Klein, who was wrestling with writing his own horror novel at the time (*Ceremonies*) and who would later write the screenplay for Dario Argento's *Trauma*, edited the magazine from its launch in 1981 to 1985, and by all accounts was the person who held it all together.

Over the years, a flood of heavy hitters in fantasy and horror conducted interviews and contributed meditations on horror fiction and film, including Stephen King chronicler Douglas E. Winter, novelist Charles L. Grant and screenwriter/genre expert David J. Schow (*The Crow*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5*). Yet, it was with the wide variety of dark fiction it published that *The Twilight Zone Magazine* made its name. Every issue carried at least eight stories by long-dead masters (e.g., M.R. James, William Hope Hodgson), contemporary best-sellers (Joyce Carol Oates, Peter Straub) and, most importantly, emerging talents. Through an annual short story contest and a policy of giving any piece of fiction a shot, *The Twilight Zone* was the publication

that introduced the US to Dan Simmons (*Carrion Comfort*, *Hyperion*), future *New Yorker* artist Felipe "Feggo" Galindo, and many others. It was also where King first published some of his own longer short fiction works, such as "The Jaunt." As the magazine's popularity grew, many

of its short stories were reprinted in a quarterly, digest-size companion publication, *Night Cry*, that launched in 1984.

Through it all, it was the *TZ* brand that enabled the magazine to cultivate an audience, and the television show appeared in some form in every issue. Zicree, who had brought Carol up to speed on genre fiction in the beginning, serialized much of his book *The Twilight Zone Companion* in the magazine. He was also instrumental in publishing several unproduced *TZ* scripts within its pages, as well as dozens of scripts for classic episodes. In addition, the publication did much to introduce the weird fiction of former *TZ* scriptwriter Richard Matheson to a wider audience, going so far as to put him and his son, Richard Christian Matheson, on the cover of its June 1986 issue.

Though it would boast a circulation of 250,000 at its height, the magazine never outgrew its fanzine feel, with departments often switched around, and fiction jockeying for position with coverage of more mainstream movies, television, and even technology. Yet, it was this rough-around-the-edges quality that kept readers coming back for more. Each issue promised the unexpected: a pre-*Hell-raiser* interview with Clive Barker, a horror movie quiz or a tongue-in-cheek cover story about Gahan Wilson's experiences playing the original *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game, all tucked between ads for cruises and impossibly expensive, leatherbound copies of the *Necronomicon*.

Still, by the end of the 1980s, the periodical was running out of steam, and not even switching to cheaper paper could save it. Though it ceased publishing in June of 1989, its influence remains. In 1988, the long-running horror magazine *Cemetery Dance* debuted with a similar format that featured fiction, features, reviews and artist illustrations. Then, in 1997, a Toronto horror nut named Rodrigo Gudiño launched *Rue Morgue*, based in part on his own memories of the mag. Zicree once described *The Twilight Zone Magazine* as "that loosey goosey kind of thing where my dad has some musical instruments in his barn, let's put on a show." Thirty years later, others are still singing its tune.

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