

# Fielding's Review

## TALES OF TOMORROW COLLECTION THREE

Image Entertainment. 2-DVD set, \$24.99. 6 hours, 42 minutes. Full frame, black and white, Dolby Digital mono. From the Wade Williams Collection. Licensed through Corinth Films. [www.image-entertainment.com](http://www.image-entertainment.com).

Nearly forgotten now, *Tales of Tomorrow* was once one of the best science fiction programs on television. All other sci-fi series of the time, such as *Tom Corbett* and *Space Patrol*, were meant for kids. The ABC anthology series was aimed strictly at adults and done live from August, 1951 to June, 1953 on Friday nights from 9:30 to 10. Mostly the stories dealt with ordinary people having their lives changed by something overwhelming, usually extraterrestrials, nuclear radiation anomalies, or the unexpected consequences of advanced technology.

Although the stories were mostly of the pulp fiction variety, some classic literature was condensed to its half hour format, including the famous *Frankenstein* episode with Lon Chaney Jr. and a two-part version of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. A radio version was broadcast on ABC and later CBS from January to April, 1953.

Image Entertainment's other two-DVD collections of *Tales of Tomorrow* kinescopes have been reviewed



here, but this third one best shows off the series' uniqueness. Emanating from New York City, the show had the advantage of top acting talent for its casts. The leading actors in this new collection include James Dean, Rod Steiger, Joanne Woodward, Boris Karloff, and Leslie Nielsen.

Since it was telecast live, these kinescopes occasionally have flubbed lines and clumsy stage direction. Revealing boom mike shadows, even the lens of another television camera, are common distractions. For all the ineptness of the procedures behind the camera, the actors of the time knew how to seamlessly cover up such mistakes. It's unlikely you will catch all of the



bloopers on your first viewing. Other production glitches further show how early television was barely able to keep the telecast from falling apart. Crude superimposed titles and credits all have the same font, often appear lopsided, and scroll with inconsistent starts and stops.

Episode chapter stops number from seven to ten each. The live commercials for Maslan carpets and Kreisler watch bands, which I enjoyed as much as the episodes, can be skipped. Some of the episodes on the second DVD have ABC program promos instead of commercials. The loss of its sponsors is most likely what killed the show.

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***Seeing Eye Surgeon*** (September 5, 1952) – Bruce Cabot, Ed Jerome, Constance M. Towers, Joseph Holland. On the day before he performs a brain operation on a nuclear physicist, a doctor (Cabot) receives a miraculous pair of glasses that allows him to see and understand the brain perfectly. The lenses have a more mysterious origin than he could have imagined.

***Youth on Tap*** (aka *Young Blood*, September 26, 1952) – Robert Alda, Harry Townes, Mary Alice Moore. Interference bands plague this episode but it's watchable. Alda and Moore play a young couple in desperate need of a thousand dollars to start life together. Townes is a cunning stranger willing to pay Alda a grand in exchange for a pint of his blood. Alda loses more than he bargains for.

***The Horn*** (October 10, 1952) – Franchot Tone, Stephen Elliot, Barbara Joyce, Joe Latham. A humble inventor (Tone) develops a silent trumpet that can control the emotions of anyone its player desires to manipulate. His power-mad rival steals the horn with the intention of enslaving humanity.

***Many Happy Returns*** (aka *Invaders from Ground Zero*, October 24, 1952) – Gene Raymond, Flora Campbell, Clifford Sales. Parents discover their young son has made a device in his basement that can send and receive solid matter. They are shocked to discover he has received his instructions telepathically from a being on the moon. And all the boy's other friends are similarly being driven by this creature! It's an above average episode marred by a bold white scratch in the last ten minutes.

***The Window*** (aka *The Lost Planet*, November 7, 1952) – Frank Maxwell, Rod Steiger, Virginia Vincent, William Coburn. Here's my favorite episode of the entire series and one of the most memorable early television episodes I've seen in a long time. The show begins as usual with an episode titled *The Lost Planet*. Within the first minute, the picture breaks up and we are suddenly viewing through the window of some NYC apartment where two men and a woman sit drinking at a kitchen table. The picture breaks up again and we're back at the studio where the floor crew is desperately trying to figure out what happened. The regular telecast has stopped. The actors on the set of *The Lost Planet* are standing by. The camera has swung around to

reveal the spacious ABC studio. The tense director on the floor and the producer in the control booth yell back and forth trying to figure out what to do. After another unexpected interference showing the same apartment, the ABC personnel come back on the air nervously apologizing and insisting they have no idea what's happening. The chief engineer is even hustled before the camera for a short interview. Back in the kitchen, one of the men (Rod Steiger) passionately kisses the woman before hurrying out the door to kill her husband,



who has just gone down the street to a local market. The station crew rushes to figure out where that store is and call the cops in time to prevent the murder.

The actual studio crew of floor manager Jim Walsh, announcer Roger De Koven, agency executive Robert Lewine, chief engineer Merle Worster, director Don Medford, and producer Mort Abrahams were used.

In its November 12 issue, *Variety* reported on the commotion the show caused. In a piece titled "Shades of Orson", the story reported that about a hundred and fifty calls jammed the switchboard from viewers wanting to know if the incidents they were seeing were genuine. The Cincinnati station, WCPO-TV, thought the technical failure was real and put up a standby slide for much of the telecast while it checked with the network by phone.

***The Fatal Flower*** (December 12, 1952) – Victor Jory, Don Hamner, Jose Merced, Lovey Powell. Two botanists in the jungle spend all their time cataloging

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the local flora, especially their prize specimen, a giant meat-eating plant. A dispute over a prank drives them to become bitter enemies. They don't call it "the fatal flower" for nothing....

**The Bitter Storm** (December 26, 1952) – Arnold Moss, Joanne Woodward, Philip Pine, Ethel Remey. In the show's Christmas episode, Arnold Moss plays an embittered inventor who has developed a machine that can be tuned to playback any words that have ever been spoken. When he picks up the sound of Christ speaking the Beatitudes, he realizes he can miraculously under-



stand the ancient language perfectly and his life is transformed. And then disaster hits.

## DVD 2

**Another Chance** (February 13, 1953) – Leslie Nielsen, Virginia Vincent, Robert Middleton. Nielsen is a small-time diamond cutter who has stolen a priceless brooch and so fears being caught he refuses to leave his apartment. His disgusted wife leaves him. A newspaper ad leads him to an inventor of a time machine. For a fee, it will return him seven years into the past where he might get a fresh start on life. But he is in for a tragic disappointment.

**The Great Silence** (February 20, 1953) – Burgess Meredith, Lilia Skala, Paul Ford, William Kemp. In one of the show's few comic episodes, a strange mist, thought to be the result of nuclear testing, has spread over the Western half of the United States, rendering

everyone temporarily mute. Meredith plays a simple mountaineer who discovers the real cause of the mist: an alien in a UFO parked in his woods! Since he can't speak or write, his desperate pantomiming describing what he has seen convinces everyone only that he is insane. He figures it's up to him to do something about that alien.

**The Fury of the Cocoon** (March 6, 1953) – Nancy Coleman, Peter Capell. Explorers in the jungle come upon a deserted hut and an empty cocoon the size of a pumpkin. A journal reveals that the creature that came out of it is a blood-sucking invisible alien! And it's still outside!

**Read to Me, Herr Doktor** (March 20, 1953) – Everett Sloane, Mercedes McCambridge. Sloane stars as an elderly inventor who has built a life-size mechanical man programmed to sit in his den and read classic literature to him. But his daughter (McCambridge) thinks it's a frightening thing and pleads with him to get rid of it. She's right: the invincible robot develops a mind of its own and starts giving orders.

**Ghost Writer** (March 27, 1953) – Leslie Nielsen, Gaby Rodgers, Murray Matheson. Nielsen stars as a penniless writer who answers a want ad from a kindly man who will pay him five hundred dollars for finishing the stories he has begun. Then all the stories of murder and disaster actually happen!

**Past Tense** (April 3, 1953) – Boris Karloff, Robert F. Simon, Katherine Meskill. Karloff plays a poor doctor who has somehow built a time machine in his basement. He plans to take penicillin back to the early years of the century and save lives while making a fortune manufacturing the antibiotic. Too bad he doesn't know such hopes never work out well on *Tales of Tomorrow*!

**The Evil Within** (May 1, 1953) – Margaret Philips, Rod Steiger, and James Dean. Three people in the cast and the only one successful enough to receive star billing is Margaret Philips. In a peculiar twist on the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde story, Steiger is a chemist who brings home a new experimental serum, only to have it break in the refrigerator and leak into a pie his wife eats. She develops an evil personality completely unlike her normal docile self. James Dean has very little to do as Steiger's lab assistant.