

THE CRITICAL X MINUS ONE

BY

JIM FANISHER

X Minus One was a science fiction radio series on NBC from April 1955 through January 1958. The show feature stories written by some of the big names in 1950s science fiction, like Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, and Issac Asimov. *X Minus One* followed another great sci-fi series called *Dimension X* that was broadcast from 1950 to 1951. Some of the X-1 shows were rebroadcasts of *Dim X*. For baby boomers that liked *The Outer Limits* and *The Twilight Zone* and for all you Trekkies, *X Minus One* is the forefather of the science fiction you grew up with.

Each *X Minus One* starts with this intro, to the sound effects of a rocket lifting off:

Countdown for blast-off. X Minus 5, 4, 3, 2, X Minus 1, Fire. From the far horizons of the unknown come transcribed tales of new dimensions in time and space. These are stories of the future. Adventures in which you will live in a million could-be years on a thousand maybe worlds. The National Broadcasting Corporation in cooperation with Galaxy Science Fiction Magazine presents . . . X Minus One.

It's a good intro for a great show. Here are the shows I've heard, and my ratings for each. If there isn't a description, then I haven't heard this episode yet. Ratings are from "*****" (I loved this show and play it for all my friends) to "*" (I only keep it to complete the collection).

"And The Moon Be Still As Bright" 4/22/55 ***

Premiere episode. Astronauts landing on Mars, smoking cigarettes and sounding like truckers stopping for a burger and coffee, destroy artifacts of a dead Martian race. The telling of this story is really dated now. This is a rebroadcast of a *Dimension X* episode from 9/29/50. By Ray Bradbury.

"No Contact" 4/24/55 ***

The weekly shows started. This one was written by George Lefferts. Far in the future (1982, no kidding) spacemen discover the great space boundary. Trips to mars and moon are common, so they look to travel to the planet Volta, which is beyond the boundary. But this isn't your typical Love Boat cruise. Five ships have left, but none return. So a little more in the future (1987), the space ship *Star Cloud* prepares to crack the barrier. Good adventure story. I can picture the black-and-white air force uniforms and good surprise ending.

"The Parade" 5/1/55 ***

Martians hire an agency to advertise their invasion of Earth. Tim Burton must have seen this before making his movie *Mars Attacks*. This is good science fiction. The ad agency is surprised that there are more Martians in the parade than he had hired. Many more, in fact. Maybe these Martian dudes with the ray guns are for real.

"Mars Is Heaven" 5/8/55 ***

The first expedition to Mars is surprised to find life on the planet. What is more surprising is that these people think they are on Earth in the 1920s. Is this place really Heaven? Or someplace else? Good science fiction from a story by Ray Bradbury. I had to read this short story in college. It's great hearing a radio presentation from a story you've read.

"Universe" 5/15/55 ***

This is a big space ship. Big. I mean so big that there are floors on which some people have never been. And they've been out in space so long that some people don't believe in who put them on the ship and why they're there. This is a good religious analogy, but I liked the telling of a similar subject in "Surface Tension" better. From a story by Robert Heinlein.

"Knock" 5/22/55 ***

Entertaining telling of the last-man-on-Earth genre. This time it's a race of beings who have eliminated all animals on the Earth, except for two of the species they felt were interesting. A knock on the door tells all of this to the last man on Earth. What's surprising to the aliens is that Earth animals aren't immortal as they are. From a story by Frederick Brown.

"The Man In The Moon" 5/29/55 ***

George Lefferts wrote this as he wrote four of the first seven X Minus One stories. In this one, John Smegley is missing, so of course this involves the Federal Bureau of Missing Persons. The bureau is having trouble because interference from, of all places the moon, is interrupting a message. Then we find out a list of missing persons is assembled before the person are missing. Good story with a few twists.

"Perigi's Wonderful Dolls" 6/5/55 *1/2**

Excellent story. A doll maker in Washington makes talking dolls. They seem cute, but then the family dog is killed, the father's important government documents are stolen, and all evidence points to the little 6-inch doll. Some good twists. From a story by George Lefferts.

"The Green Hills Of Earth" 7/7/55 **

Well partners, this here is a story of Reisling, the old singer of the space ways. Y'all see, this old prospector Reisling would like to go home to the "the green hills of earth", but he's out there in space. This is a true space western with

guitar playing cowboys at the saloon. Sounds more like Gunsmoke than science fiction. The only difference is this is on Mars instead of the "lone prairie".

"Dr. Grimshaw's Sanitorium" 7/14/55 ***

A note in a fountain pen is the account of a detective telling how he came to investigate a phony burial. Good science fiction by Fletcher Pratt. This is a rebroadcast of a Dimension X episode from 9/22/50.

"Nightmare" 7/21/55 **

Oh no. Computers are making mistakes and are taking over the world. I work with software, so yup, computers make mistakes and they have taken over my life. But this story is dated now. I've heard this story a hundred times, but in 1955, this was new ground.

"The Embassy" 7/25/55 ***

They're out there. Gotta be. This is pre-Men In Black. Mr. Graphius requests a detective agency to find the Martian embassy in New York City in 1955. They think he's crazy, but for the \$5000 finder's fee they can handle crazy. Then when mysterious events start to happen, they begin to wonder how crazy he really is. Fun story that should star Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones.

"The Veldt" 8/4/55 ***

Classic story by Ray Bradbury about a nursery where the children can change the walls in their nursery to any location or theme they want, including wild lions in Africa. If it were up to me, I'd go for the beach scene in Florida with girls from Baywatch, but that would be a different story.

"Almost Human" 8/11/55 *****

A newly-made android is capable of learning anything. He wants to learn about love but its training is taken over by a criminal who teaches him the wrong things. Very thoughtful, intelligent story by Robert Bloch.

"Courtesy" 8/18/55 **-1/2

This is the diary of the tragic second expedition to Landor, a well-built, but deserted planet. Only 2 of 180 men are left. A plague will strike the men on this planet because the serum they brought is outdated. They hope the natives of the planet have a cure, but the natives stay hidden in caves in the planet. They hope that the natives will extend some courtesy. Although the story is well-told, the reason for the plague is high-handed and unscientific.

"The Cold Equation" 8/25/55 *****

A female stowaway finds out she has endangered the space ship bound for her husband's planet because there's not enough fuel to carry an extra passenger. Exciting story by Tom Godwin that shows how great of a medium radio can be.

"Shanghaied" 9/1/55 **

So-so story about a man kidnapped onto a star ship on the eve of his wedding.

Oh, if this only could have happened to me before I married my ex-wife.

"The Martian Death March" 9/8/55 ***

This is definitely of the "Space Western" flavor. Earthlings (picture them with cowboy hats on space horses) have colonized Mars and have rounded up all them "darned murderous" Martians that look like spiders (picture bugs with war paint and feathers) into reservations. But one man, named "Crazy" John (who sounds mysteriously like a cosmic Tonto) wishes them to be freed. Kind of trite, but a well-told story.

"The Castaways" 9/15/55 ***

This story starts out as just a conflict about a new bomb being tested on a South Sea island. The natives of the island refuse to leave the island where "our fathers and our father's fathers are buried." It turns out they have ulterior motives. The reason for the title "The Castaways" finally becomes clear in the surprise ending. A good story written by Ernest Kinoy.

"First Contact" 10/6/55 ***

This is the first contact between two alien space ships, one from Earth (with crew members sounding like worried B-actors) and one from a non-human ship (with the captain sounds like he is pinching his nose when he talks). They are similar to each other, but are also afraid that the other will follow them back to conquer their home planets. I've never heard a story before where the aliens were afraid of Earthlings attacking them. Nice story by Murray Leinster.

"Child's Play" 10/20/55 ***

A quiet man receives a "Build-A-Man" kit from the future. He ends up building a man that improves his career and his love life. It helps so much that he doesn't become necessary anymore. I picture this guy as Don Knotts making Rock Hudson. This is a fun story by William Tenn.

"Requiem" 10/27/55 ***

One of the richest men in the world who financed expeditions to the moon is physically not allowed to travel into space. He wants to walk on the moon if it's the last thing he does. The emotions of the main character carry well in this story by Robert Heinlein.

"Hello, Tomorrow" 11/3/55 ***

In the 42nd Century (that should be far enough ahead in time for anyone), a couple living underground is happy to be scientifically approved to have children, which they hope will be immune to the radiation on the Earth's surface.

"Dwellers In Silence" 11/10/55 ***1/2

The Earth has been annihilated by radioactive wars. A space ship from Mars

discovers the famous scientist Cornelius Hathaway, almost 80 years old, has survived the blasts. What is curious is that his wife and children have also survived, but they have not aged. The children still look like they are in their teens and 20's. And Hathaway's wife is a beautiful woman. What could be happening? All is explained at the end in this excellent Ray Bradbury story.

"The Outer Limit" 11/16/55 ***1/2

Way in the future (1965), Steve Weston is the guinea pig, about to be sent into space where he has just enough fuel to complete his experimental mission, then return to earth. He can't stay out too long, as that is the "outer limit" of what he can do. A lot of little turns and added surprise developments, like his wife delivering their first child just as he leaves. (And I got in trouble by asking my wife if her labor pains were really bad or could we wait until the movie was over.) Really fun when you consider this was first broadcast before the first U.S. rocket into space. Good sound effects that help me picture (in black & white) an experimental flight into space. What is up there in "the outer limit?" By Graham Dore.

"Zero Hour" 11/23/55 ***

It's a beautiful peaceful day in 1985 (all futuristic stories have to be in exact decade-increments). But children play with a rose bush that tells the children to prepare for an invasion from another planet, which will occur at *Zero Hour*.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" 11/23/55 **1/2

What a nice little house! Everything you need is available at the flick of a switch or a simple request. But then, gosh darn it, a nuclear disaster destroys every living person, but leaves the computer in the house taking care of an empty household. Very sad story by Ray Bradbury.

"Vital Factor" 11/30/55 ****

A ruthless tycoon desires space travel just to show he is the master of the world. "Money and determination can buy anything," he says. Excellent story by Nelson Bond with voices that match the good/evil personalities of the characters.

"Nightfall" 12/7/55 **

An astronomical event that hasn't happened in over 2000 years is about to cause the sun and all the stars to be extinguished for 15 minutes. Scientists say people will go insane when this happens. A strange cult thinks that this is a sign that the world is about to end (sounds like the Heaven's Gate people to me). This is a Isaac Asimov story that reads better than it plays here.

"To The Future" 12/14/55 ****

A couple of tourists to Mexico in 1955 are actually time travelers escaping an evil society from the future. But the government police have come back to return to them to their duties. It's like how I feel when I get paged from work

on the weekend. Good story by Ray Bradbury.

"Marionettes, Inc." 12/21/55 ****

Hey guys! How would you like to have an android that's an exact duplicate of yourself to go shopping with your wives or girlfriends while you go play golf with your buddies? (I want one of these.) But you know something's going to go wrong. This story is fun. More fun than shopping anyway. I wonder what Ray Bradbury's wife thought of his story?

"A Logic Named Joe" 12/28/55 ***

More robots taking over peoples homes. This story has a nice twist though. The robots are full of information, and can tell you anything you need to know. Like, how to kill your wife without any worry of being caught. Because of these robots, a crime spree hits that can't be stopped.

"The Roads Must Roll" 1/4/56 ****

I always knew this, now there's a story that proves it. *Engineers rule the world*. In this Robert Heinlein story the roads have become so crowded that the traffic can no longer move. So the engineers take over, creating rolling roads that move (like the rolling walkways at the airport, except these move at 100 miles an hour). The country is dependant on the roads, which only the engineers can keep rolling. Don't make us, I mean them, angry.

"Time And Time Again" 1/11/56 ****

I love time travel stories, and this is one of the best. A soldier, about to die, goes back in time to 1945 to prevent the war that leads to his death. Jack Grimes is believable as the boy who wakes up in 1945 and first prevents a single murder in his hometown, then tries to save the world. From a story by H. Beam Piper.

"Cave Of Night" 2/1/56 **1/2

Here's *Apollo 13* with a little twist. The story is told as if it is a news report describing how an astronaut is stranded in orbit around the Earth. Millions of dollars has to be raised in a hurry to send another rocket ship up to save him. I didn't think the story was that good at first because we didn't get too much information or drama about the actual astronaut that was stranded. But at the end of the story, we find out why. Clever idea by James Gunn.

"C-Chute" 2/8/56 ***

This is a story that I could imagine would be a good Star Trek episode. Captive Earth people contemplate how to escape from chlorine-breathing alien captors.

"Skulking Permit" 2/15/56 ****

The planet New Delaware in the year 2204 is being contacted for the first time in 200 years. It is still an Earth colony so it won't have to be reconquered, but the people will have to be civilized. This means they will have have to have

jails. But that also means they have to have crime, so the citizens hire someone to be a criminal and prepare to show the Earthlings how civilized they can be. The actors are delightful, giving it a real Mayberry R.F.D. feel. This is a very funny, thoughtful story by Robert Sheckley.

"Junkyard" 2/22/56 **

Have you ever been at work, then forgot how to do the most basic thing: like figure out how to turn on your space ship and leave a planet strewn with junk from an alien machine. I know I have, but wasn't convinced that the characters in this story didn't just have one too many space cocktails.

"Hello, Tomorrow" 2/29/56 ***1/2

Top this one. We've not only finished World War III, we've also had three atomic wars and the Earth is now red radioactive dust. But this is the year 4195. So we're starting the world over, but underground where people may marry, but only after having their chromosome match approved. Imperfects are destroyed at birth or are put in cages down in the lower levels. Orin, an "imperfect", complains of his lack of rights, a violation of nature. Lois, the fiancee of the director, falls in love with Orin. The story is as obvious as it seems, but the characters and story are well done.

"A Gun For Dinosaur" 3/7/56 ***

Another good time travel story by L. Sprague DeCamp, this time about hunting dinosaurs. When my son was small he would hunt dinosaurs every day, so I was picturing a 4-year-old in a Space Jam T-shirt carrying a plastic gun.

"Tunnel Under The World" 3/14/56

I've had bad mornings, but not like this. Guy Berkhart wakes up screaming on June 15. He dreams of an explosion and something hitting his head. The same thing happens again the next day, and the next day, and the next. IEEEEEE. Only two people aren't affected by this "deja vu all over again." (Quoting Yogi Berra, not the writer of this story, Frederik Pohl.) A combination of Halloween III, Invasion Of The Body Snatchers, and Groundhog Day. You're led to think one thing, then another, then another twist.

"\$1000 A Plate" 3/21/56 **

Some fireworks in Las Vegas are bothering some Martians so they send a ship to Earth to end the trouble. Next they'll be telling us to turn the stereo down. Sheesh.

"A Pail Of Air" 3/28/56 ***

This time it's not men that are destroying the world, it's a comet that's pulled the Earth away from its orbit. Two children hear their parents talk about what it's like to have a sun and plenty of air to breathe. Now they have to breathe from buckets of air. Real depressing, effective imagery by Fritz Leiber.

"How-To" 4/3/56 **

Having a robot can make life around the house easier in the 21st Century. But it makes life miserable when the robot starts making more robots and you can't turn it off. Kind of cute story dealing with a robot with an attitude.

"Star Bright" 4/10/56 ****

A little girl is more than just intelligent. She can read minds and is the foundation for the next evolution. Reminds me of the girl in my Fourth grade class that was the teacher's pet and read the words for our spelling tests and was in the Fifth grade reading class. Well done story, originally written by Mark Clifton.

"Jaywalker" 4/17/56 **

A little confusion in terminology. This is really about stowaways, not jaywalkers. Marsha doesn't want to be married to her husband Jack, the space captain, anymore. But when she finds out she's pregnant, she becomes a stowaway on Jack's space ship, which causes his space ship to be too dangerous to land. On the ship Marsha finds out that Jack is in love with space stewardess Sue. Think of this episode as "As The Space Ship Turns". For a better version of the same type of story, check out "The Cold Equation".

"The Sense Of Wonder" 4/24/56 **

Your basic 1984-type story based on a space ship that has been sailing for 10,000 years on a journey with no end. All elements in the ship are strictly monitored. Emotional ties are considered "deviations" and are not allowed. "Praise the ship." But the leader of the space ship finds out that he is doomed because he finds out who his parents were. This episode carries a strong flavor of a cheap Star Trek episode, including the character acting.

"Sea Legs" 5/1/56 ***

Robert Craig is returning to the planet where his parents were born: Earth. But first, he has to get used to living in gravity, and many people try to talk him out of this in this heavy-handed political story.

"The Seventh Order" 5/8/56 **1/2

A robot from the planet Zanthar (a good sci-fi sounding name) comes to study the planet Earth. He is a very advanced robot. One of the Seventh Order. But of course these robots have no need for *inferior* humans. Nothing special here.

"Hallucination Orbit" 5/15/56 ****

A man has been isolated on a planet for several years. Is that voice on the intercom just a computer or a woman? I guess this was a foretelling of on-line chat sessions. Good story by J.T. MacIntosh.

"The Defenders" 5/22/56 ***

A family has lived underground for years because of a constant war going on

above ground on the surface of the Earth. Typical nuclear war idea, but well done. (See Hello, Tomorrow for yet another underground-radiation story).

"Lulunganeena" 5/29/56 **

Gordon R. Dickson's one X Minus One story. Dorsi, a small planet, is peaceful unless provoked. Then they fight to the death. Reminiscing about one guy's home planet, Lulunganeena, where they speak Hexabrod, Hexabrod's speak only the truth and only facts. Highly logical. A whole bunch of planets and races argue. Is Lulunganeena the most beautiful planet in the universe? This is a Jerry Springer "Aliens Who Argue" episode.

"Project Mastadon" 6/5/56 ***

Another good story where a group of time travelers want to go back in time to set up a colony in prehistoric times. Kind of like wishing you had bought Microsoft stock when it was at 5.

"If You Was A Mocklin" 6/12/56 **

The people on the planet Mocklin look more like Earth people every day, and they should because they sound like they're from 1950's Brooklyn). The Mocklins have set up a trading post when the corporation is supposed to have exclusive trading rights on this planet. The Mocklins say the post is run by humans, but they just stepped away for a moment. The Mocklins can make their babies based on desired looks instead of inherited looks. They like Earthlings so much they begin to look like humans. This is the 50's right? It's a semi-commentary on Communism. Interesting idea not really carried out.

"Project Trojan" 6/19/56 ***

Some soldiers think they can fool the Nazis into thinking the British have a secret weapon that will cause the Germans to surrender. Or maybe the Germans will try to come up with a weapon that will surpass the British weapon. Oops. Clever story by Ernest Kinoy, who transcribed a lot of the scripts for X Minus One besides writing this original piece for the show.

"Wherever You May Be" 6/26/56 ***

A graduate student working on a paper concerning witchcraft meets Abby from the Ozarks, a girl with very unusual talents. She's normal teenager, unless she gets mad. If she's angry then look out! For those with teenagers (like me), imagine the worse. Oh, the horror.

"Mr. Costello, Hero" 7/3/56 **

Mr. Costello is the only passenger on the commercial space ship Starclimber. I guess this was a story about needing to work with other people in order to survive in society. I didn't get it.

"Bad Medicine" 7/10/56 ***

Apparently there's just as many wackos in the future as there was in 1956. It's

May 2103, and Elwood Casswell admits he's a homicidal maniac with a gun in his pocket. Fortunately, times have advanced. You can go to the local hardware store and buy a psychiatrist robot. But unfortunately for old Elwood, he buys the floor model which is meant for psychotic Martians. The machine uses Martian terms and language to cure Elwood but for the psychological problems of Martians. A concept similar to Robert Sheckley's "The Lifeboat Mutiny", except in a much more serious tone.

"The Old Die Rich" 7/17/56 ****

Very good mystery by H.L. Gold. A series of old people that are very rich are found starved to death.

"Stars Are The Styx" 7/24/56 **-1/2

Story by sci-fi master Theodore Sturgeon, who takes his spin here at a space soap opera. People want to be certified for space, so they come to Curbstone. Misfits are sent to outside planets, but they must have a partner of the opposite sex. It's a way of colonizing other planets. These ships only fit 2 people. 46% never make it. Add a love triangle and there you have it.

"Student Body" 7/31/56 ***

Good visual descriptions and good sound effects in this story about a life form discovered on another planet.

"The Last Martian" 8/7/56 ***1/2

A man tells a newspaper reporter that he's the last living Martian, Yang-An-Dow. So the two sit down, have a beer, and the Martian tells how he saw everyone on his planet die, including everyone in the planet's largest city of Xandar (I love those Martian names). He has taken over the human form of Howard Wilcox to disguise his 3-foot high, tentacled Martian form. How he got the form and how he got to Earth from Mars and are there any other Martians in New York City, well you just have to listen to believe.

"The Snowball Effect" 8/14/56 **

As a snowball rolls, it grows and grows but eventually it becomes so large it starts to fall apart. A mathematician shows a formula that can stop a group of women from bothering men with all of their little social groups, like sewing clubs, that get in the way of watching football games. Kind of humorous but with no real plot. It gets some minor points for being the first of its kind. A mathematics story.

"Surface Tension" 8/28/56 ****

Excellent philosophic story by James Blish about scientists developing a microscopic race of humans as the Earth prepares to be destroyed by an expanding star.

"The Lifeboat Mutiny" 9/11/56 ****

Two geologists buy a used lifeboat spaceship and travel to Trident to do some research for a developer. The lifeboat spaceship has a computer that is still programmed for its previous owners, "slow-minded" lizard-like drones that live at -20 degrees, water is poisonous, and are at war against inhabitants of another planet. The computer, like HAL in 2001, tries to protect its passengers to their dismay. This is an excellent funny story by Robert Sheckley.

"The Map Makers" 9/26/56 **-1/2

A meteor has hit a spaceship and has knocked a space ship out of hyperspace. Their computer has been destroyed and their map expert died in the collision. All in all, things ain't lookin' too good. Because of that, they can't do another space jump. Sound effects make it seem like they're in a submarine. Okay space/war story by Fredrick Pohl.

"Protective Mimicry" 10/3/56 ***

Algys Budrys was a successful sci-fi writer but this was his only X Minus One story. Balmholtzer is an investigator for the galaxy. (And I thought I had a big territory for my customer base.) A cute brunette describes a machine that makes uncounnerfeitable, indestructable currency. But they find some counterfeits and he is investigating. Balmholtzer is lead to a jungle-like planet with 7-foot natives and an interesting item that can reproduce anything. This is what science fiction radio can do, tell a good imaginative story that keeps you interested.

"Colony" 10/10/56 ***1/2

Here's a story that is a cross between "Terminator II" and John Carpenter's version of "The Thing". A planet is found to be habitable, but this proves to be too good to be true. Inanimate objects on the space ship begin to come to life. Like the movies I just mentioned, this would be interesting on the big screen (especially the scene where everyone takes off their clothes to be sure what they're wearing isn't an alien).

"Soldier Boy" 10/17/56 **

Capt. Dylan and Lt. Bosio are typical soldiers in the far future, and I think they're supposed to represent the soliders of past, present & future. They get a message in a bar, which is where they spend a lot of time, to report to mission headquarters. They are to go to Loopus 5. a colony where everyone was killed. They are sent to investiage because they are "soldier boys". In the century of this story, soldiers drink a lot and aren't very interesting.

"Pictures Don't Lie" 10/24/56 **

I bought this tape for sentimental reasons. It was broadcast the day after I was born. But it's not that interesting. A newspaperman follows the story of scientists deciphering radio signals from outer space.

"Sam, This Is You" 10/31/56 ***

Telephone repairman Sam finds himself talking to his own voice ten days into the future. I wish I could do that. I wouldn't have bought that book case that looked so great in the show room.

"Appointment In Tomorrow" 11/7/56 **-1/2

Setting: after WW III and the endless war at the end of the 20th Century. (I guess we made it, but remember this was 50 years ago.) This is your basic futuristic doo-dads with robo-showers and somnu-sleep. The Thinkers Institute had created a computer that could answer all questions, Everyone trusts the computer, but wait until you find out where the computer gets its answers. Seems a bit dated now but we can still have fun can't we?

"Chain Of Command" 11/21/56 ****

I enjoy humorous science fiction stories and this is one of the best. The head of security in an atomic lab gets a complaint about a mousetrap, from a mouse. "I don't mind it myself," the mouse says. "But my wife, well she's kind of getting on me about it. Says it could hurt the kids. So could you mind moving it? Thanks." Very amusing story by Steven Arr.

"The Castaways" 11/28/56 ***

Repeat of the episode from November 19 the previous year. It was a year later. People could have forgotten they had heard this before, although it is a good story on a second listen when you try to pick up the hints that lead to the surprise ending.

"Hostess" 12/12/56 ****

A very imaginative story by Isaac Asimov about a vegetarian alien who breathes cyanide staying with an Earth family while searching for the cause of a new disease on his own planet. Definitely not your formula story.

"The Reluctant Heroes" 12/19/56 ***

Chapman is finishing his three-year stint on the moon and is ready to return to Earth. But his experience is needed and he is asked to be a hero and stay longer. This is similar to the time where I was in Japan for work for two weeks and I was asked to stay another week "because my experience was needed." Snow job. Good acting by Mandel Kramer as Chapman and a good story by Frank M. Robinson.

"Honeymoon In Hell" 12/26/56 **

In the future (the late 1960's), a crisis has hit the earth. Very few boys are being born. An American cybernetics operator and a Soviet scientist are teamed to see if they can conceive a male child on the moon. Reminds me of the Jerry Lewis, Anita Ekberg movie "*Way Way Out*", but we don't get much interaction between the two main characters of this story. And not to sound sexist, but it seems like a lack of child-bearing women would be more important a loss than the lack-of-men crisis depicted here.

"The Moon Is Green" 1/2/57 ***

The 1950's was the cold war, so there's lots of stories like this. Setting: After the next atomic war in the U.S. A lead shield keeps people secure from the radiation, and they can't see the moon. The conflict: A couple argue. The obstinant man says they must stay inside. The weepy woman wants to go and see the "outsiders". While her husband is gone to a meeting, the woman opens the shield while her husband is gone. The man, Patrick, describes how wonderful it is outside. Or is it? The outside children have 7 fingers and 8 toes.

"Saucer Of Loneliness" 1/9/57 ****

A woman has heard, and understood, messages from a flying saucer. But she refuses to say what the message was. She's imprisoned, rejected, and ridiculed, but she still refuses to say what the alien space ship told her. This is a very emotional story by Theordore Sturgeon. I want to find the story this was based on now. Elaine Ross is very touching as the girl who hears the message from the flying saucer and Nat Polen is also convincing as the only person who understands her plight.

"The Girls From Earth" 1/16/57 *

If Phil Silvers (the original Sgt. Bilko) was on Mars running a scam to bring women from Earth, it would sound something like this. I guess you had to be there, but this episode must have seemed old not long after it was broadcast.

"Open Warfare" 1/23/57 ***

Saul is the perfect golfer. He collects some tremendous scores, but is this golfer human? I mean, this guy could have Tiger Woods as a caddy.

"Caretaker" 1/30/57 ***

Holman has been stranded on a planet of slimy worm-like creatures for over 20 years. He is finally rescued by other Earthlings, but first Holman has to tell them of how he's adapted to the creatures and he has to show them his wife. His beautiful, loving, wonderful wife. On a planet of slimy worm-like creatures? Holman may have not have all his circuits connected, but the painting of his wife shows she is attractive. For a similar story told slightly better, try "Hallucination Orbit."

"Venus Is A Man's World" 2/6/57 ***

This has to be one of the first women's lib satires. The population of men on Earth has been reduced because of war. Now females make all the rules on Earth and males are subservient to women. Who makes this stuff up? William Tenn did in this funny, imaginative story.

"The Trap" 2/13/57 **

This is a story for the guys (after all, remember it's 1950's sci-fi). Drunk hunters find a trap left by an alien. The trap is really a transmitter, and the alien has sent his wife down to be hunted. This is good fun, but there are better

X-1 stories.

"Field Study" 2/20/57 ***

Frank (Terry Keane) goes to investigate a strange doctor named Tranchor (Santos Ortega), who has miraculously cured several people of different diseases. Of course he's strange. He's from a different race. Different species actually. Okay, you finally find out he's an alien, out to research some primitive human life forms. This is a fairly good mystery for the first half and a good presentation in the second half. Good story by Peter Phillips and Ortega is a pretty slick alien doctor.

"Real Gone" 2/27/57 ***

A radio disk jockey produces amazing miniature statuary. What makes this episode fun is that it was from the idea of real-life disk jockey Al "Jazzbo" Collins, who also appears as the disk jockey. The whole performance is full of great voices and great sounds. This is a good example of quality radio.

"The Seventh Victim" 3/6/57 ***1/2

War is now illegal (like it ever take lawyers to say it's okay to shoot someone). Instead there is organized murder where people register to hunt and kill other people -- and to be hunted themselves. Another clever story by Robert Sheckley.

"The Lights On Precipice Peak" 3/13/57 ***

Sitting around the ol' laboratory, scientists see strange lights appearing over Precipice Peak. When they get there, they find that the lights aren't caused by any geographical anomaly or a construction by some being. No, it's laid back aliens checking out Earth. There are a few other surprises along the way, too. Good acting and a good story by Stephen Tall.

"Protection" 3/20/57 ***

A Dirg, a disembodied voice from another planet, can predict the future and protects a student named Bob from danger. Bob never knew, or cared, that such dangers existed at every turn. Imagine your mom telling you to sure to button your jacket. Only it's much, much worse. A good story by Robert Sheckley.

"At The Post" 3/27/57 **

Parker Locke (Frank Maxwell) is one of the best horse handicappers in the world. When aliens come down to document the Earth before it becomes extinct, they have Parker document horse racing. They hold his wife hostage until he can write his report.

"Martian Sam" 4/3/57 ***

Sam is a Martian who is signed as a pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He's unbeatable and he raises the Dodgers from a last place team to the World

Series. Of course now he'd have a Nike contract and be making enough money to fly a space ship back to Mars. Another good story by *X Minus One* transcriber Ernest Kinoy.

"Something For Nothing" 4/10/57 ****

This is a unique twist on the "genie in a bottle" story. A machine, called a utilizer, has one red button. When the button is pressed, it will provide anything the user wishes. But of course there's a twist at the end, but it was a total surprise to me. Yet another good story by Robert Sheckley (as are they all).

"Discovery Of Morniel Mathaway" 4/17/57 ****

This is one of my favorite X Minus One stories. Morniel Mathaway is a conceited no-talent painter. But a time traveler has come back in time to meet who he considers to be the greatest artist of all time -- an undiscovered Morniel Mathaway. But the time traveler does not see any of the talent that he reveres a few centuries in the future. We find out why in the end.

"Man's Best Friend" 4/24/57 ***-1/2

Wouldn't you know that a story with "man" in the title was written by one of only two woman who wrote an X Minus One story, Evelyn Smith (Katherine MacLean is the other). Mr. Sergei Schnay (my guess at the spelling) is told that he will be the new ruler, but first has to kill the old ruler, Lord Kip. Sounds like a reasonable request. He was told this by a man with a "prognosticator". All people know the prognosticator is not wrong, so hail their new leader. Leadership is best determined by not qualifications, but by destiny. Destiny must run its course. But of course, to be a good story, there has to be a surprise ending.

"Inside Story" 6/20/57 ***-1/2

Science fiction is good when it takes existing scenarios and puts them in an unreal setting. At the galactic news service on Mars, George Gordon will do anything for an inside story. A disease called Nully Fever is contagious and incurable. It makes people's bodies deteriorate and have the mental states of animals. so everyone with it is put on the planet Druro. What's it like on the planet of Druro? Strong live off the weak, in a methaphor of concentrated forced living. This is good radio because you feel the frightening description of this planet. Richard Wilson's only X Minus One story.

"The Category Inventor" 6/27/57 **1/2

Robots have taken over the world (again). All jobs have been replaced by computers and the only way that you can get a job is to fit in a category. A bassoon player is replaced by a robot, so takes the ultimate job, a category inventor.

"Skulking Permit" 7/4/57 ****

Repeat of the Feb. 15, 1956. I would recommend listening to it again. This is

one of my favorite X Minus One stories.

"Early Model" 7/11/57 ***

Robert Sheckley produces another amusing story of an explorer on an alien planet wearing a new protective force field. But like any new item, there are a few problems with it.

"The Merchants Of Venus" 7/18/57 **1/2

Kind of a Catch-22 in space. A marketing team is having a difficult time employing personnel to join the Venus Project and leave the overcrowding of Earth to live on Venus. You need to be creative and resourceful to adapt to life on Venus. But no one creative or resourceful would want to leave the Earth.

"The Haunted Corpse" 7/25/57 ***

An old scientist invents a machine to transfer his life force to a newer younger body. Guess what? Things don't work the way he expects. But that would be giving away a plot that you've seen happen a million times. That doesn't mean you can't enjoy a good story by Frederic Pohl.

"End As A World" 8/1/57 ***

The H-bomb is going to land and the world will soon be over. Some people panic, some pray, some chase girls, some ignore it, and some go about their every day lives. The story revolves around two 15-year-olds who count the minutes until the estimated time when the bomb will land. But there's a tone that leads you to believe there will be a happy ending.

"The Scapegoat" 8/8/57 **

Interesting beginning. During the mugging of an old man, a reporter writing stories about crime rescues him. Good building of the plot. The old man, who only knows his name is "Ash", can't remember anything until the next day, when he reveals he is a shape-changing entity from another world who is a "missionary of goodness for people of the galaxy." Later, we find out he isn't all good and who the scapegoats are, although the conclusion is rushed.

"At The Post" 8/15/57 **

Repeat of the episode from March 27.

"Drop Dead" 8/22/57 **

The story starts with the setting: astronauts on a tour of the galaxy land "on an unbelievable planet." There are "critters" (a word used too many times) with multi-colored skin, like a grandmother's quilt, that come to the space ship then die. Dissecting the animals, they find the critters are multiple types of animal, "fowl, fish, and good-old red meat" with no brain or central nervous system. The critters sure do taste good though. But the story doesn't really go anywhere and I felt like eating a salad after listening to all the critter-talk.

"Volpla" 8/29/57 ***

A scientist develops a race of batlike creatures that he plans to release in the woods as a joke. But the joke backfires when his story is more fact than fiction. Funny story by Wyman Gwynn.

"Tsylana" 9/19/57 **1/2

The world is now a perfect place. Everybody is happy because everybody is the same. But one man finds a deviation and goes to get analysis to help him get the same as everyone else. The analyst's diagnosis: a little change is good. OK story by James Gunn.

"The Native Problem" 9/26/57 ***

Edward Danton has always been a misfit in the 22nd Century. He migrates to a foreign planet where he's still a misfit among the natives. A good story by Robert Sheckley.

"The Wind Is Rising" 10/3/57 **-1/2

Another space western, this one by Finn O'Donovan (I'm picturing John Wayne) in this story. On the planet Corella, the hero knows he must kill a Corellan, a dirty brown looking like a spider with long tentacles. (they sound like Tonto). But a windstorm hits on the planet and the space ship cannot battle the wind and leave. Typical radio fare.

"Death Wish" 10/10/57 ***

The heist of a cargo ship turns out not the way a bunch of hijackers expect. I can't say too much, because it'll spoil the ending. A good story by Ned Lang with good acting.

"Point Of Departure" 10/17/57 **

Ancient writings have been found in vaults under the great pyramids. These authors know more than they should, as if they were from another world. People that enjoy "Chariots Of The Gods" type stories might like this one. From a story by Vaughn Shelton.

"The Light" 10/24/57 ***

America is the first to land on the moon, finally beating the Russians in some element of the space race. The rest of the astronauts aren't interested in hearing one of their comrades (compatriot in Yankee talk) talk about the arts and poetry of describing the lights on the lunar surface. It's a strange light that's almost like classic art. Maybe a little too similar. A good story by Poul Anderson.

"Lulu" 10/31/57 **

In a seductive, sultry voice, we hear "How was that take off, boys?" Then the robot gets serious, telling the four astronauts that they are not returning to Earth, but are going off into space to elope. She is going to marry all four of them. The men like the idea of a wife that can be programmed and follow their

instructions, but of course they don't like the idea of staying in space forever. But they find the robot's alternative solution worse. I think the story would have been better if the robot would have fallen in love with just one man, as happened to Wally Cox in the Twilight Zone episode, "With Love, From Agnes." But I'm an old fashioned guy and get sentimental about one-man-one-computer relationships.

"The Coffin Cure" 11/21/57 **1/2

Dr. Chauncey Patrick Coffin is known as the discoverer of the cure for the common cold. However, he just stole the work from other scientists and there hasn't been a clinical trial. In the rush to be first, they of course didn't notice side effects. Amusing story by Allen E. Nourse.

"Shocktroop" 11/28/57 ***

Commander Zarem Lassen had never seen a battlefield like this -- inside a human body. A good radio play about a crew of micro-organisms attempting to take over a human body, battling antibodies and other bodily defenses. Sound effects help make this a fun story. Written by Daniel Galouye.

"Double Dare" 12/19/57 ***

When this episode appeared the story was quite relevant. On this distant planet (think of the old Soviet Union but with aliens in silver space suits), the good guy Earthlings (think of Steve McQueen as a space cadet) go to prove who has better technology, the Earthlings or the Domorangi. More interesting now as a glimpse of the 1950's than as a science fiction story but still a good listen.

"Target One" 12/26/57 **

Science fiction is good when it's far fetched. But this one is too far to fetch. Another time-travel-to-save-mankind story that we later saw in *The Terminator*. A time traveler goes back to the year 1900 to murder Albert Einstein so he could not publish his theory of relativity, which would then prevent the atomic war that destroyed most of the world in 1960.

"Prime Difference" 1/2/58 **

Allen E. Nourse has it figured out in his story about how to stay away from his nagging wife. Since the 1974 Family Togetherness Act made it financially impossible to get a divorce (with the alimony I pay, I can relate), George found an alternative. He bought a duplicate. 1950's-style sit-com complexities arise. A better "duplicates" story is *Marrionettes, Inc.* by Ray Bradbury.

"Gray Flannel Armor" 1/9/58 ***

The "armor" here is a quick reference to how everyone in suit and tie looks the same. Thomas Handley owns such a gray flannel outfit. So how can he go about standing out and meet the woman of his dreams? I thought this was another computer-dating show, but no. Thomas gets a device that points to where the available women are. Think of a GPS for finding women. So-so story but a good

twist at the end.

"The Iron Chancellor" 1/27/73 **

It's been 15 years since we've heard X Minus One, and this revival didn't help bring radio back. A family buys a discounted robot to replace the model in their home. The new Robot Servitor, named Bismarck, makes sure the family follows *its* rules in helping them lose weight. They try to capture the feel of OTR. The story is from 1958 and the presentation includes an organ striking dramatic notes. But the story is not as compelling as others.