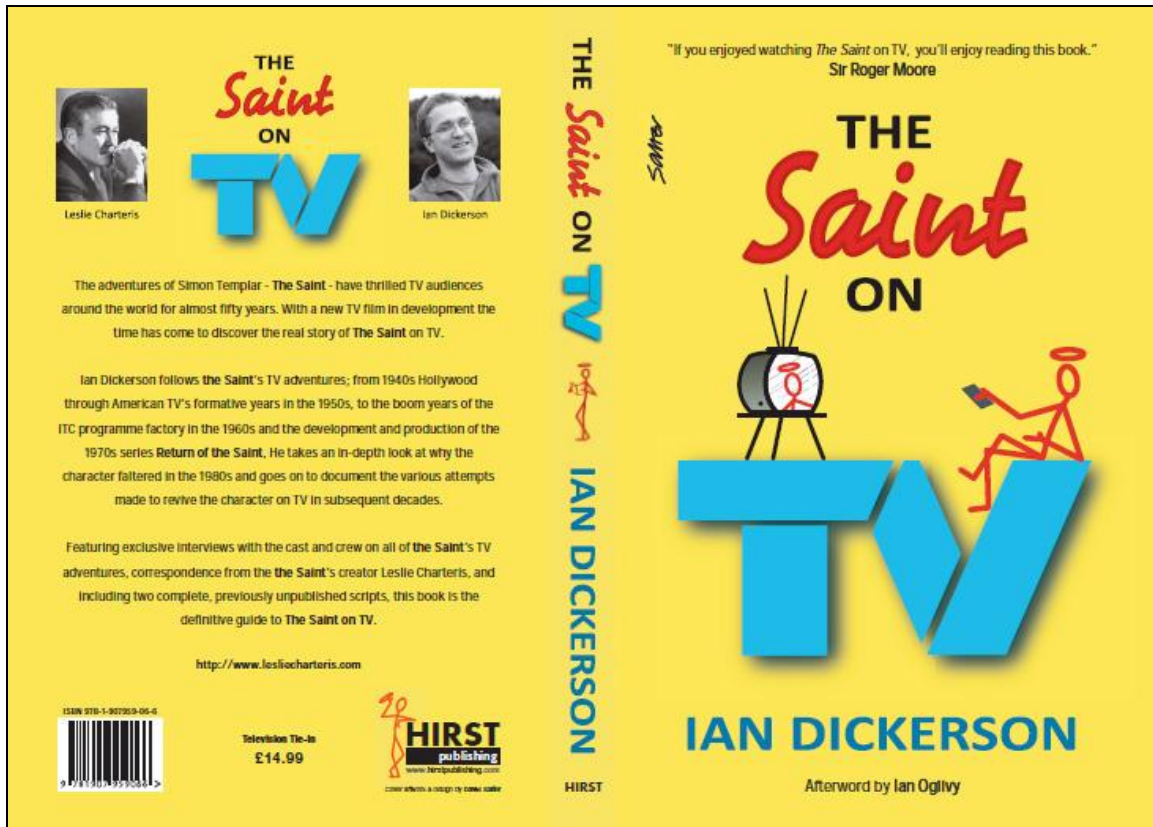


Review: *The Saint on TV* by Ian Dickerson



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Reviewed by Wesley Britton

“I’ve had so many people tell me there ought to be a TV series about you that I’ve sometimes wondered whether you were fact or fiction.”
(Network executive to Simon Templar in “The Happy Suicide” by Leslie Charteris, 1958)

If you were to pick the ideal scribe to detail the full history of Leslie Charteris’s Simon Templar—The Saint—in all his TV incarnations, odds are you’d want Ian Dickerson for the job.

From his teen years on, Dickerson has been a fan of Saintry television, literature, and all the other media Templar has featured in. As a result, Ian was picked by Leslie Charteris himself to become Honorary Secretary of the Saint Club in 1989, a post he still holds. Ian’s subsequent projects included contributing to the documentaries for British DVD

releases of the Roger Moore and Ian Ogilvy series. He has longtime associations with the producers, cast, and crew who worked on the shows along with special access to the Leslie Charteris archives. So Dickerson is uniquely qualified to write *The Saint on TV*.

True, much of the story of The Saint on television has been told before, but mostly in short, chapter-length overviews. These include James Chapman's 2002 *Saints and Avengers: British Adventure Series of the 1960s* and Robert Sellers' 2006 *Cult TV: The Golden Age of ITC*. (There's also a discussion in my own *Spy Television*, 2003). Then there's Burl Barer's exhaustive *The Saint in Print, Radio, Film, and Television, 1928-1992*. All these books are more than worthwhile as they place The Saint in wider contexts. However, Dickerson contributes a new, fully-fleshed out volume that showcases information not published before.

In particular, Dickerson's detailed episode guide is preceded by a history of Leslie Charteris's first attempts to bring his character to the small screen in the early years of television, the most revealing discussion of this period to date. Likewise, Dickerson updates the saga by presenting the various attempts to resurrect the character since the failed Val Kilmer film including discussions of aborted plans that may still bear fruit.

In between, Dickerson gives the production histories of the various series starring Roger Moore, Ian Ogilvy, Simon Dutton, and Andrew Clark, provides episode synopses with trivia about cast and crew, and, oddly, the altered names of each episode used in foreign countries. The dates of British broadcasts are included, but not the states, which is understandable especially as many episodes were shown in syndication in America. The most interesting of these notes are comments from Leslie Charteris responding to many scripts and finished dramas. By and large, Charteris was a cranky and therefore, for the reader, entertaining correspondent until the Ogilvy version. He liked Ogilvy but few others involved.

The Crown Jewels of this book are two unproduced scripts presented as appendices.

"Good Hunting" was written by Leslie Charteris based on his own story first published as a comic strip in *The New York Herald-Tribune* in 1951 and never published since. Intended as a TV movie, *The Saint Steps Out* was inspired by Charteris but with substantial work by John Goldsmith. It's an adaptation of a 1930s story with The Saint battling the Nazis. This adventure is alone worth the price of admission.

Simply stated, *The Saint on TV* is one of those books that includes the expected material of such overviews but includes its fair share of new features to make it worthy of the attention of Leslie Charteris, Roger Moore, Ian Ogilvy and Simon Dutton fans. It's a new contribution to the Saint's legacy well worth a halo of its own. What we can all hope for is a new Saintly television series that will require Dickerson to issue an updated version down the road.

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