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The Late Shift: Letterman, Leno, And The Network Battle For The Night



Synopsis

With two giant careers, millions in ad dollars--and maybe even an entire network--at stake, David Letterman and Jay Leno faced off over who would host the Tonight Show, the most profitable program in TV history. This is the inside account of this high-pressure confrontation.

Book Information

Hardcover: 336 pages

Publisher: Hachette Books; Edition Unstated edition (May 4, 1995)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0786880899

ISBN-13: 978-0786880898

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 43 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #192,195 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in Books > Humor &

Entertainment > Television > Direction & Production #168 in Books > Humor & Entertainment >

Television > History & Criticism #3315 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts

Customer Reviews

Carter, who covers the television industry for The New York Times, writes of the corporate battles surrounding late-night talk shows in the wake of Johnny Carson's retirement. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Hardcover edition.

Carter, a media reporter for the New York Times , provides an inside account of one of the hottest behind-the-scenes power struggles in the history of television: the battle for Johnny Carson's vacant seat on the Tonight Show. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Hardcover edition.

I had a contract to write for Jay, courtesy of Helen Kushnick, and this book is an inside look at what late night is really like. Jay continues to be a likable personality, vs. Letterman (my brother-in-law appeared on Letterman, and said he was the coldest individual he ever met). Both have talent, but both approached being a human being differently.

Fascinating behind-the-scenes look at how Dave lost the "Tonight Show," but gained so much more

by being himself and not another Johnny Carson. Let's face it, as accomplished a joke-teller as Leno is, he stole most of his show from Letterman---running out of the studio to do a recorded bit, having the band play music for a comedy bit and "Stupid Headlines." It may be more than 20 years old, but it shows how network executives care about ratings over innovation.

Bill Carter's *THE LATE SHIFT* chronicles the flawed transition of Jay Leno in succeeding Johnny Carson as host of "The Tonight Show" in 1992. The villain that drives the narrative in the first half of the book is Leno's out of control manager Helen Kushnick. She ruthlessly wins the day for Leno in getting him Carson's chair, but then she keeps on pushing and manipulating to the point that both NBC and Leno let her go. The second half of the book is driven by Letterman's decision to stay at NBC or jump ship to CBS. Described as talented as least a hundred times by Carter, Letterman's insecurities make the final decision totally unpredictable. Described as nice as least two hundred times by Carter, Leno has a simplicity that works for NBC's brass. He'll go anywhere, do anything with the affiliates to promote himself and the show. The level of detail of the in-fighting at NBC indicates that the losers (those who supported Letterman) were quite willing to talk to Carter, and Carter takes full advantage of it to show the incompetence of the NBC suits every step along the way.

If you have any interest in the behind the scenes details of the David Letterman-Jay Leno drama over the takeover of The Tonight Show, this book is for you. Well written with all the juicy details! Quite the page turner.

It's a great look back at when late night television was still a critical aspect for networks... before things got fragmented. I highly suggest reading this and immediately following up with Carter's "The War for Late Night".

Fantastic behind the scenes look at how NBC mismanaged its talent and let Letterman get away.

I absolutely loved this book. I finished it in under a week, because it was so hard to put down. Recommended for fans of the shows, especially with an interest in the television industry. Even though it is quite an old story now, it's still very interesting. The author does a great job of telling the story from both sides of the fence, with a complex cast of characters.

This is a great nonfiction read. It keeps you interested throughout, and provides really gripping character analysis: You get the good, the bad, and the ugly from each comic, and great insights into the entertainment world. I learned a lot too from this book!

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