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The Case of Down Alive: Brick Mallery, Private Investigator Series, Volume 3

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Scenario Productions (April 1999)
Unknown $11.95 (pp)
978-1-894003-03-2

“What you are about to hear might traumatize or shock….” Brick Mallery’s *The Case of Down Alive* might also leave you laughing out loud. This offbeat spoof of the 1940s radio genre opens with private investigator Mallery introducing himself and listing the kinds of cases he handles.

He specializes in murder cases, making a point to mention it several times. After indulging in this homicidal name-dropping, he relates *The Case of Down Alive*. Mallery has fallen asleep (while practicing reading aloud) when Norman Raines enters his office. Raines wants protection from his father-in-law’s deathbed threat to come back from the grave on Raines’ tenth wedding anniversary and cause him to go permanently insane.

While Mallery’s partner, Vic Steed, busies Raines by teaching him how to win at craps by ripping off the dealer, gumshoe Mallery checks on Raines’ background with police detective Brian Dryer. He learns that Raines’ identical half-twin sister had been up on a murder rap at one time and that Raines had also been under investigation then. Intending to question Raines’ wife, Mallery goes to the couple’s house, rings the doorbell and is greeted with a spooky-sounding tune. He quickly finds himself sliding through a tunnel to a dark, labyrinthine basement dungeon where he encounters Raines’ wife. She introduces herself as “an immediate source of your distress” to which Mallery solemnly replies, “That’s a very long name.” Mallery is then strapped to a rack and tortured with a leather belt before the evil woman gives him “the old shallow grave treatment” of being buried “down alive”—up to his neck in dirt. The Raines couple later confesses that having found Mallery’s name listed in National Surveillance Magazine, they have selected him to test “a mind-altering drug which is dispersed from pain.”

It’s not surprising that the two previous Brick Mallery episodes won the Publishers Weekly “Listen Up” Award for Best Audio Mystery. This is not particularly sophisticated comedy; in fact, some critics have compared the acting company to the old Firesign Theater. Many of the gags are downright corny. For example, upon destroying the maniacal shrunken head of Raines’ father-in-law, Vic Steed quips, “I guess he should have stopped when he was a(head).” The jazzy bass and xylophone music, “tough guy” voices and endless detective cliches truly enhance this delightful production. There’s a lot of fresh, creative fun here and aside from a somewhat abrupt ending to the story and occasionally too-loud background conversation, Brick Mallery’s *The Case of Down Alive* delivers a case of hilarious entertainment.

JILL R. HUGHES (October 16, 1999)

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