

The Saint

Cover for Saint radio episodes released commercially in England

Contract For A Saint (9 July 1950)

Synopsis and critique

Vincent Price - Simon Templar
Arthur Q. Bryan - Augie Postlethwaite
Ronald Stanton
Linda
Briggs
Waiter

Street sounds. Simon Templar calls for a taxi. "You don't want a taxi, Mr. Templar. I've got a car right here." Simon is surprised to be accosted by Augie Postlethwaite, a small time crook who is 'back on the Apple' after doing a stretch in Alcatraz. Augie's got one of those voices that makes you think a little of Elmer Fudd, but that makes it somehow all the more menacing as he insists that Templar get into the car, and that he get behind the wheel. Simon is prepared to go along with the gag, except Augie pulls a gun to enforce his words. This is something Simon never appreciates.

As he drives, Simon pumps Augie for information. Since Augie knows Simon won't be able to tell a soul, Augie gives. He's been hired to kill the Saint by someone named Ronald Stanton. Having found out all he can, Simon presses down hard on the accelerator and the car starts tire-screeching through traffic. Augie demands he stops, threatens to shoot him, all of which has no influence on Templar. "Please, Mr. Templar, stop!" begs Augie. Simon obliges by stamping on the brakes. Augie's head hits the windshield and Templar liberates the gun. "M. Templar, what was the idea?" Augie demands in a shocked voice. "Don't you realize, we could have been *killed*?"

Simon Templar rings a doorbell. In just a few seconds he hears footsteps and a fussy voice saying, "Never mind, Johnson, I'll get it. I'm expecting visitors." The butler walks away. A

man opens the door, "Yes?" "Are you Ronald Stanton?" asks Simon calmly. "Yes, and you?" "Simon Templar." "Simon Templar! As I live and breathe." "No, as I do." Simon has come to find out why a man he's never heard of wants him dead, but he never gets a chance to ask the question.

Stanton allows Simon into the house. "You have nothing to worry about, Mr. Templar. I am constitutionally incapable of violence. That's why I'm forced to depend upon dullards like Augie." Stanton has a rapid fire, tenor voice, and comes across as quite likeable in an amoral sort of way. "As a matter of fact, I'm really in every way unsuited for the sort of work I've engaged in. I should have been an artist. I have the soul of an artist, the temperament of an artist, the intellect of an artist..." "Then why aren't you an artist?" "My paintings stink. So, you find me a swindler instead. Degrading...but a man must live..."

Simon doesn't contradict him. "Well, now, to business," says the garrulous Mr. Stanton. "I suppose you've come here for your money..." "Have I?" says Simon in surprise. "...yes, since Augie failed me, I suppose I'll have to pay."

He goes to his unlocked safe (he can never remember the combination) and pulls out some money. "No, no this is only \$12,000." "Only \$12,000." Simon repeats in a noncommittal voice. "Yes," Stanton says apologetically. "You see, I really didn't expect you. If you come to the office tomorrow, I'll give you the other three. Will you be there?" "Unless I wake up in the meantime," Simon says, trying to control hysterical laughter. "Good night, Mr. Stanton."

The next morning, Simon walks into an outer office where a receptionist is typing busily. When he introduces himself as Simon Templar, she is very surprised. "The Saint!" He flirts with her briefly, then requests to see Mr. Stanton. She excuses herself, and returns in a few minutes with Mr. Briggs, Stanton's secretary. Briggs has a habit of repeating everything he says. "Ah, yes, ah, yes. What is it, sir, what is it?" One imagines him to be a portly, fussy little man, with black hair and a mustache. Briggs says Mr. Stanton isn't in, and requests that Simon wait in his office. Simon enters it all unsuspecting, and there's a *whap* as he's coshed on the head.

"Linda," Stanton's voice comes over an intercom. "Where's Briggs?" "Isn't he in his office?" "I've been buzzing, no answer. Go find him, will you?" "Yes, sir, Mr. Stanton, he was here just a little while ago."

Linda finds Simon crumpled on the floor in Briggs' office. He's just reviving as she calls his name. She helps him to his feet and he leans on her, groggily. Linda peppers him with questions he can't answer, til he asks one of his own. "Is Mr. Stanton in?" "Yes, he's been in all morning. So I couldn't understand why..." Their dialog falters as they remain comfortably together, but then Stanton enters the room and they part quickly. Stanton views them indulgently, and professes complete surprise and distress when they inform him that Simon had been knocked out.

Simon follows Stanton into his office. Stanton hands over the remaining three thousand dollars. "We're agreed this settles my account with you, eh?" Stanton confirms. Simon agrees. "But I've still got an account to settle with Mr. Briggs," he says grimly.

Evening. Restaurant noises. Simon greets Linda, who's surprised to see him. "I invited you to dinner, did you think I'd stand you up?" She informs him that the police have found Briggs.

She informs him of this several times but Templar doesn't get the point. Finally she says, "He's been murdered." This ruins Simon's appetite for just a few minutes, just long enough for the captain of the waiters to stop by and be sent away.

Simon asks Linda what Stanton's racket is. "Why, he's in the real estate business." "So it says on his door, but what's his racket?" "I don't understand." "I wonder." Linda goes on to say that all she knows is that Mr. Stanton has had some big project under way, he's been selling stock in it. "So that's it," says Simon. "...You don't pay off somebody to the tune of fifteen thousand dollars for a legitimate business deal."

"I don't know much about it," Linda says, "I've only worked for him a short while. Whom did he pay off?" "Me." "You! But you said you didn't know him!" "I didn't."

Simon explains that he thinks Briggs had been blackmailing Stanton about his shady business dealings. Anticipating that Stanton wouldn't like being blackmailed, he hadn't given his own name, but used that of the Saint, because of the Saint's reputation. ("It's a name that carries weight with the underworld," says the Robin Hood of Modern Crime). He'd probably intended to send a messenger for the money, but Stanton had decided to take matters into his own hands and send an assassin after the Saint. Then, when the Saint had turned up asking to see Mr. Stanton, Briggs had worried that secret would be revealed, so he'd knocked Simon out and made his escape. After revealing all these deductions to Linda, the Saint has recovered his equanimity, he suggests that they order dinner.

Street sounds. Simon calls for a taxi. "You don't want a taxi, Mr. Templar, I've got a car right here." Templar introduces Linda to Augie. Augie tells her he's "charming to have met you. It is a pleasure. Now scam!" Simon urges her to 'scam', telling her he'll call her later. Once again, Augie produces a gun, but this time, *he* gets into the driver's seat. "My left hand stays in my lap with the gun...no tricks this time...we ain't gonna have another fabasco. *I* am a careful driver." Indeed he is. So much so that when Simon slams his foot down on Augie's foot which is on the gas pedal, Augie drops the gun and grabs the wheel with both hands. Simon retrieves the gun. "I think you'd better give up this line of work, Augie." "Believe me, Mr. Templar, I am giving it serious consideration!"

A door opens. "Mr. Templar!" says Stanton, surprised, not to see him alive, but to see him without Augie at his side. He hadn't sent Augie to kill him this time, but to bring him to Stanton's house. "What do you want?" "It's rather difficult to ask, without Augie." "It shouldn't be hard to ask, it may be hard to *get*."

Stanton explains that he'd paid \$15,000 to Simon for silence. He'd hoped that Simon would repay him, for same. The police are searching for the man who was in Brigg's office that morning. If Augie were present, Stanton could offer Simon the choice between arrest or freedom. But since Augie failed him again, the whole matter becomes an academic question. Stanton continues ingratiatingly. "You can't blame me for trying. After all, you would have done the same...no hard feelings..."

Simon telephones Linda, and asks her to meet him at Stanton's office. She peppers him with questions, but finally agrees. At the office, they leave the lights off – in case Stanton should come calling. Simon had seen him packing at his house, and wouldn't be surprised if he showed up. Simon goes into Brigg's office, and then buzzes Linda on the intercom. "...well, I'll be right out." "Did you find what you were looking for?" "Yes."

Just as Simon returns to the outer office, Stanton walks in. Simon turns on the lights. "...Seems you've beaten me, Templar, to everything but...the draw! Put up your hands!" "I thought gunplay was out of your line, Mr. Stanton." "Sometimes one is forced to take matters into one's own hands. But I assure you I don't relish it so please do as I say. Because if I'm forced to shoot you, I know I shall be quite ill."

Simon is able to rest the gun away from Mr. Stanton, prompting Stanton to comment that

perhaps Augie isn't as incompetent as he had thought. Gunplay can be very complicated. Simon tells Linda to call the police. "The police!" squeaks Stanton. "But you can't. You promised!" "I didn't promise anything, Stanton," Simon says cruelly. "That was Briggs."

"...Are you trying to say that I killed Briggs?" Stanton says, incredulous. "It's as good a story as that I did," says Simon. Linda makes the phone call. "Templar! You're making a big mistake," says Stanton hysterically. "I know, but I wanted to give Linda a chance to complete the call." Simon reveals that he knows it was Linda who killed Briggs the day before – while he was lying unconscious. When he'd come to see Stanton, she'd left her desk to get Briggs, instead of buzzing him on the intercom. Clearly she'd done that to alert Briggs that their plan had gone wrong. And she'd killed him to prevent him from talking. "You, you!" says Linda angrily. "Careful, Linda," chastises Simon. "Remember, I'm a Saint!"

Street noises. Simon hails a taxi. "You don't want a taxi, Mr. Templar, I've got a car here." It's Augie Postlethwaite again. Simon chides him for continually driving a 'hot' car. Augie confesses – he didn't steal the car, he bought it. Simon promises to not tell a soul – he knows what that would do to Augie's reputation!

Critique

Simon Templar, *The Saint*, created by Leslie Charteris, is a gentleman adventurer, the Robin Hood of Modern Crime (in the books, at least). On the radio series, he didn't do much robbing of the rich to help the poor, but he did help the poor and anyone else who needed his help - usually a beautiful woman in distress.

Vincent Price is one of many actors to play the role of *The Saint*. He brings a suave, slightly Southern charm to the role.

Contract for a Saint is a fun, light-hearted episode, with all of the actors on top of their form.

One of the joys of listening to Old Time Radio is hearing the slang of the day. The verbal fencing matches between Templar and Augie are full of slang...one wonders what it all means. These 'dated' terms do date the show, but that's what makes it educational as well as fun.