

## **ESCAPE**

Written by  
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Re-Imagined Radio  
Season 12, Episode 05, May 20, 2024

Final draft

## **ESCAPE**

Double adventure starring Vincent Price

Re-Imagined Radio  
Season 12, Episode 5  
Final Draft

Premier broadcast: May 20, 2024

Written, produced, hosted by  
John F. Barber

Sound design, Music composition, Post-production by  
Marc Rose

Graphics by Holly Slocum

### **Synopsis**

Re-Imagined Radio samples from two episodes of *Escape*, "Present Tense" and "Three Skeleton Key," both starring Vincent Price, to celebrate radio's greatest series of high adventure storytelling and an unforgettable voice actor.

### **Credits**

Written, produced, and hosted by John F. Barber  
Sound design, music composition, and post production by  
Marc Rose  
Promotional graphics by Holly Slocum with Sydney Nguyen

### **Color Code**

**Yellow highlighted text** = sound effect(s), either pre-recorded or created for episode. Pre-recorded audio is used as content in this episode.

~~**Magenta highlighted text with strike through**~~ = text deleted for episode timing

**MUSIC** = pre-recorded

**MUSIC** = bespoke, created for this episode

COLD OPEN

SFX: SAMPLE FROM OPENING OF ESCAPE.

ANNOUNCER 1 Tired of the everyday routine? Ever dream of a life of romantic adventure? Want to get away from it all?

ANNOUNCER 2 We offer you . . .

MUSIC: AN ACCENT . . . DRUM ROLL

ANNOUNCER 2 Escape!

MUSIC: THEME . . . DUCK UNDER

ANNOUNCER 2 "Escape" -- designed to free you from the four walls of today for a half hour of high adventure.

RIR THEME AND ANNOUNCER

MUSIC: RIR THEME

ANNOUNCER Welcome to Re-Imagined Radio, a program about radio storytelling. With each episode we explore how dialogue, sound effects, and music can combine to promote storytelling and engage your listening imagination. We also like to include the stories behind the story. The history. The connections. This episode is no different, and here to tell you about it is John Barber, producer and host.

HOST OPEN

HOST Hello everyone. Welcome to Re-Imagined Radio. This episode offers a double feature tribute to *Escape* and actor Vincent Price.

We sample from two episodes of *Escape*, "Present Tense" and "Three Skeleton Key," both starring Price, to celebrate radio's greatest series of high adventure storytelling and an unforgettable voice actor.

Thanks for joining us as Re-Imagined Radio presents "Escape: A double adventure."

**MUSIC: FOR TRANSITION, SAMPLE FROM  
"PRESENT TENSE"**

HOST INTRODUCTION (ACT #1)

HOST *Escape* was heard on the Columbia Broadcasting System, 1947 to 1954. During that time it was radio's leading anthology series for adventure drama, featuring a wide range of stories adapted from classic and contemporary stories by well-known writers--from science fiction to horror to murder mysteries.

*Escape* is frequently cited as the finest radio adventure anthology series ever, and is significant for providing listeners a variety of literary experiences.

The cast changed with each episode, and frequently included well known actors. Like Vincent Price.

Vincent Price (1911–1993) is legendary for his stage, television, motion picture, and radio appearances. In radio, he is noted for voicing Simon Templar in *The Saint*, 1947 to 1951. It's also interesting to note that Price provided a chilling voice over for Michael Jackson's "Thriller."

*Escape* and Vincent Price share the stage as we sample two episodes of *Escape*, "Present Tense" and "Three Skeleton Key." Both illustrate outstanding radio storytelling.

Up first is a story of murder, execution, and a man whose mental musings seek escape from the fate society has imposed upon him. Let's listen to samples from "Present Tense," episode number 96 of *Escape*, starring Vincent Price.

ACT #1, "PRESENT TENSE"

SFX: SAMPLES FROM "PRESENT TENSE,"  
ENDS WITH MUSIC

HOST CONCLUSION (ACT #1)

HOST

We just listened to "Present Tense," episode number 96 of *Escape*, first broadcast January 31, 1950, and starring Vincent Price.

The formula behind each episode of Escape was to place its actors in physical, psychological, or emotional situations from which there seemed to be no escape. The conflicts were carefully crafted and made for compelling, visceral drama that could be felt and internalized by listeners.

Roger's mental musings, voiced by Vincent Price, seek to stave off his fate as a convicted killer. But each of his imaginary "escapes" only returns him to the gas chamber, from which there can be No escape.

More information and listening opportunities at our website, reimagedradio dot FM.

**MUSIC: RIR THEME FOR BREAK**

**THE FUSEBOX BREAK**

HOST

This is Re-Imagined Radio. I'm John Barber, producer and host. I'd like to tell you about *The Fusebox Show*, produced by Marc Rose. Each episode is a carnival of quick witted and quirky conversation and commentary about current day events and news. Here's a sample.

**SFX: THE FUSEBOX SHOW TEASER, ENDS  
WITH RIR THEME MUSIC**

HOST

Learn more, and subscribe to *The Fusebox Show* podcast at their website, thefuseboxshow dot com.

**MUSIC: FOR TRANSITION**

HOST INTRODUCTION (ACT #2)

HOST

This is Re-Imagined Radio. We're listening to a pair of episodes from the the radio adventure series *Escape*, both starring Vincent Price. We just listened to "Present Tense."

We listen next to "Three Skeleton Key."

Written by French writer Georges-Gustave Toudouze (Too-DUES), the original short story was first published in English in the January 1937 issue of *Esquire* magazine.

Adapted by screenwriter James Poe, and narrated by Vincent Price as the character "Jean," "Three Skeleton Key" is often called [quote] "the story about the lighthouse and rats" [end quote]. It is that, but oh, so much more.

"Three Skeleton Key" is a CLASSIC classic adventure story. It's a perfect example of the *Escape* formula, placing characters in impossible situations from which they must escape.

And it's a perfect example of what Re-Imagined Radio is all about: radio storytelling using voice, music, and sound effects. The sound effects in "Three Skeleton Key" are award winning, by the way, voted "Best of the Year" in 1949 by *Radio and Television Life* magazine. Listen especially to the

sounds of the rat hordes as they swarm the lighthouse. This sound effect was allegedly created by the sound effects crew gnawing on berry baskets.

And listen to Vincent Price. His voice carries and builds the tension and terror of this story. Let's listen now to "Three Skeleton Key," episode #102 of *Escape*.

ACT #2, "THREE SKELETON KEY"

SFX: SAMPLES FROM "THREE SKELETON KEY." ENDS WITH MUSIC.

WILLIAM CONRAD

Tonight, we escape to a lonely lighthouse off the steaming jungle coast of French Guiana and a nightmare world of terror and violence as we bring you again in response to hundreds of requests, "Three Skeleton Key" starring Vincent Price.

MUSIC: NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN . . .  
IN AND OUT

JEAN

(NARRATES) Picture this place. A gray, tapering cylinder, welded by iron rods and concrete, to the key itself: a bare black rock, one hundred and fifty feet long, maybe forty wide. That's at low tide. At high tide, just the lighthouse, rising a hundred and ten feet straight up out of the ocean. And, all about it, the churning water -- gray-green, scum-dappled, warm as soup, and swarming with gigantic bat-like, devil fish, great

violet schools of Portuguese Man-of-War, and yes, sharks, the big ones, the fifteen-footers. And as if this wasn't enough, there was a hot, dank, rotten-smelling wind that came at us day and night off the jungle swamps of the mainland. A wind that smelled like death. A wind that had smelled the slow and frightful death that came one night to this bare, black rock.

MUSIC: STINGER

JEAN Set in the base of the light was a watertight bronze door ...

SFX: DOOR OPENS

JEAN (NARRATES) ... and in you went.

SFX: DOOR SLAMS SHUT ... FOOTSTEPS UP STAIRS

JEAN (NARRATES) And up. Yes, up and up and 'round and 'round, past the tanks of oil and the coils of rope, cases of wicks, racks of lanterns, sacks of spuds, and cartons and cans - and up and up and up. Round and 'round.

Over the light storeroom was the food storeroom. And over the food storeroom was the bunk room where the three of us slept. And over the bunk room was the living and cooking room. And over the living and cooking room - was the light.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS STOP

MUSIC: UP FOR EMPHASIS, THEN DUCK  
UNDER

JEAN

(NARRATES) She was a beauty. Big steel and bronze baby with the sun gleaming through the glass walls all about bouncing blinding little beams off the big shiny reflectors glittering and refracting through her lenses the whole gigantic bulk of her balanced like a ballerina on the glistening steel axle of her rotary mechanism . . . She was a sweetheart of a light.

SFX SLOW, STEADY CLICK OF MECHANISM  
. . . THIS IS HEARD IN BG OF ALL THE  
NIGHT SCENES IN THE LIGHTHOUSE  
GALLERY . . . UNDER

JEAN

(NARRATES) And at night, you'd lie there on the stone deck of the gallery with her revolving smoothly and quietly over your head, easing her bright white eye three hundred and sixty degrees around the horizon. You'd lie there watching to see that the feeders kept working, that everything ran right. And it wouldn't be bad. The other two fellows snoring in their sacks two levels down. You'd smoke your pipe to kill the stink of the wind. And it wouldn't be bad.

About those other two, Louis and Auguste. (CHUCKLES) What a pair. Louis, he was head man, was a big fellow from the Basque country. Black beard, little hard black eyes -- and a pair of arms that -- I tell you, those arms were as big around as my legs. Yes, head man he

was - and what word he let go was law. Silent fellow, and although I spent my first two weeks trying to strike up a real conversation, the most I could ever get out of him was...

LOUIS

Jean, I took up this profession because I don't like people. They talk too much. It's quiet work, light-tending. Let's keep it that way. You . . . you're getting to be as bad as Auguste. I thought maybe for once they'd send me somebody who could keep his mouth shut... (FADES)

JEAN

(NARRATES) That was Louis. And when he accused me of becoming like Auguste, I quieted down - because Auguste was the talkingest man I'd ever met. The talkingest and the ugliest. He was hunchbacked, stood four feet high, had red hair and big blue eyes. It seems he'd been an actor in Paris.

AUGUSTE

(FADES) Yes indeed. Played in over two hundred different productions, dear boy. At the Grand Guignol. Oh, but it was monstrous, horrible, the way we used to scare the audience. I-I was hated. Yes, yes. They used to throw things and hiss and bare their teeth at me. Finally, it got too bad. I couldn't stand it any longer! I gave up the theatre. My nerves, you understand. Yes, gave it up completely, I really did. I couldn't stand it any longer... (FADES)

MUSIC: SNEAKS IN AND CONTINUES  
UNDER THE FOLLOWING

**JEAN** (NARRATES) It all started one morning at two-thirty. I was on watch, lying on the cool stone deck, pulling on my pipe, staring out at the blackness, the phosphorescent combers and the big yellow stars, when - out of the corner of my eye, I noticed something show up for a second -- something the light had touched, far off. I waited for her to come around again - and when she did, there it was.

MUSIC: DRAMATIC PUNCH

**JEAN** A three master. A big one. About a half mile off and coming down out of the north-northwest, coming straight for us. You must understand, our light was where it was for a very good reason. Dangerous submerged reefs surrounded us and ships kept clear. But this one, this sailing vessel, was coming straight on.

MUSIC: OUT

SFX: JEAN'S BRISK FOOTSTEPS

**JEAN** (NARRATES) I went over to the gallery door and yelled down. (YELLS) Louis! Louis! (NARRATES) I couldn't understand it. I waited for the light to come around again.

**LOUIS** (YELLS FROM BELOW) Huh?! What is it?!

**JEAN** Ship! Headed for the reefs!

LOUIS (YELLS FROM BELOW) I'm coming right up!

JEAN (NARRATES) I had the glasses out now. I couldn't read her name - but I could see her quite plainly. All sails set, the foam creaming away under her bow, her beautiful lines. A Dutch ship, I guessed her. But why didn't she turn? Every time it passed, our light hit her with the glare of day.

SFX: LOUIS' FOOTSTEPS APPROACH

LOUIS Ship? Where?

JEAN North-northwest. The light will touch her in a moment.

LOUIS Can't she see?

JEAN Look at her. She just keeps coming on.

LOUIS (DISGUSTED) The squareheads.

SFX AUGUSTE'S FOOTSTEPS APPROACH

AUGUSTE What is it? What is it?

JEAN Watch! North-northwest.

AUGUSTE (AFTER A PAUSE) Ah. I know! I know what it is!

LOUIS What?

AUGUSTE The Dutchman! The Flying Dutchman! We did a play about her once. Oh, what a performance! "You ghastly galleon, hag-ridden, curse-driven, must on and on--"

LOUIS Aw, shut up, will you?! (AFTER A PAUSE)  
Eh, she's luffing.

JEAN Yes.

LOUIS Sloppy way to come about. (REALIZES)  
She's derelict, that's it.

JEAN Derelict?

LOUIS Abandoned. The crew left her for some  
reason or another. But instead of  
sinking, she's gone on, running before  
every wind.

AUGUSTE She'll not run long. Not with these  
reefs to break her up.

LOUIS A beautiful ship. Now, why would men  
leave a beautiful ship like that?

MUSIC: STINGER THEN DUCK UNDER

JEAN (NARRATES) She didn't ram us although we  
all expected it. But as we waited for  
the crash, she luffed again. Caught some  
odd gust and went about.

We watched her the rest of those black  
hours, heeling and rocking, pushed and  
pulled by every stray wind, every freak  
current. Watched her until the dawn  
came. Till the sea turned from black to  
pearly gray. And on she came again,  
heading for us. We all had our glasses  
trained on her now.

LOUIS Auguste? You can kill the light.

AUGUSTE

Right, chief.

JEAN

She doesn't look so good by daylight.  
Think she'll ground this time? (NO  
ANSWER FROM LOUIS) I say, do you think  
she'll ground this time?

LOUIS

(STUNNED) Hm, this is impossible.  
Absolutely impossible.

JEAN

What?

LOUIS

Here, take my glasses. They're better  
than yours.

JEAN

All right. What is it you're--?

(AFTER A PAUSE, NARRATES) I had to  
focus, and then -- my breath froze in my  
throat. The decks were swarming with a  
dark brown carpet that looked like a  
gigantic fungus, but undulating. And on  
the masts and yards, the guys and all,  
were hundreds, no thousands, no, mill--  
I don't know, an inestimable number --  
of enormous rats.

LOUIS

See them?

JEAN

Yes. I see them.

LOUIS

Now we know why she's derelict.

JEAN

Yes, now we know.

AUGUSTE

(APPROACHES) What are you two doing?  
Here, give me a look.

LOUIS (TO JEAN) Yes, give him the glasses. (TO AUGUSTE) Take a good look, chatterbox. Give you something to talk about.

JEAN She's still heading for us.

LOUIS Yes.

AUGUSTE (WHIMPERS IN FEAR)

JEAN If she's going to turn, she'd better turn soon.

LOUIS Suppose she doesn't?

JEAN You mean suppose she piles up on the key?

LOUIS It's low tide.

JEAN Yes. Yes, it is.

LOUIS Well, where's all the conversation, Auguste? Huh? Here, want the glasses again? Want another look?

AUGUSTE No! No!

JEAN She's still coming on.

AUGUSTE (TO THE SHIP) Go away! Go away!

LOUIS (TO THE SHIP) Turn, will ya?! Turn, I say! I pray you, turn.

SFX: THE SHIP BREAKS APART ON THE REEF

JEAN She's cracking up.

AUGUSTE The rats! Look! On the water! Like a carpet!

JEAN They're swimming.

LOUIS Sure they're swimming. Those are ship's rats.

JEAN But they're swimming for the rocks!

AUGUSTE The door below! It's open!

JEAN Come on!

SFX: THREE SETS OF FOOTSTEPS RACE  
DOWN THE STAIRS

JEAN (NARRATES) And down we went, racing down the stone stairs, taking them three and four at a time. Scared? You bet we were scared.

LOUIS Auguste! You get the windows. Maybe they can climb. We don't know.

AUGUSTE Right, chief. But hurry! Hurry!

SFX: FOOTSTEPS SLOW TO A STOP

LOUIS Look! See them?

JEAN No.... Oh, yes, I do. Up at the other end of the rock.

SFX: MMILLIONS OF SQUEAKING RATS,  
GROWING LOUDER AND CLOSER EVERY  
SECOND

LOUIS Look at them.

JEAN (AWED) Millions!

LOUIS They smell us. Here they come.

SFX: DOOR GROANS BUT DOES NOT CLOSE

LOUIS Close the door!

JEAN (STRAINS) I can't. It's stuck.

LOUIS Here, let me...

SFX: GRUNTING, THEY STRUGGLE WITH  
THE GROANING DOOR, FINALLY SLAMMING  
IT SHUT ... MUFFLED SQUEAKING  
CONTINUES

JEAN Made it.

LOUIS Holy-- That was close.

SFX: A SINGLE RAT SQUEAKS

JEAN Look! One got in. Look. There.

LOUIS Well, get him!

SFX: THEY CHASE THE RAT, HOLLERING  
AND KICKING

JEAN Watch it! He--! Kick him!

LOUIS What a brute!

JEAN (NARRATES) He was as big as a tomcat.  
Bigger. And his eyes were wild and red.  
His teeth, long and sharp and yellow. He  
went for us -- starving, ravenous -- and  
we fought him, fought that one rat all

over the room. It was -- oh, believe me, I don't exaggerate, it was like fighting a panther!

SFX: FINALLY, AFTER A DEATH BLOW,  
THE RAT SCREAMS AND DIES

LOUIS Got him.

JEAN We'd better get aloft.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS RUNNING UP

JEAN (NARRATES) As we ran up the winding staircase, we passed the tiny windows of the various levels and at every one was a thick, wriggling, screaming curtain of brown fur. I was ahead of Louis and I dreaded each successive level. Suppose they had found a way in?

SFX: MILLIONS OF SQUEAKING RATS ...  
IN BG

AUGUSTE Look at them! Oh, will you look at them?!

LOUIS It's a nightmare.

AUGUSTE Will you look at them?!

JEAN (NARRATES) The air of the gallery was thick and fetid with the stink of them. The light was dim -- brown -- filtered through the crawling mass that swarmed over the glass -- all about us! We couldn't see the sky. Nothing. Nothing but them. Their red eyes. Their claws.

Their wriggling, hairy snouts. And their teeth. The rats. They screamed and howled and threw themselves against the glass. They were starving.

SFX: RATS SCREAMING AND SCRATCHING,  
DUCK UNDER THE FOLLOWING

JEAN And we three -- (LOWERS HIS VOICE) We stood -- very quietly. Oh, very, very quietly in the center of the glass room -- under our beautiful light. And we waited.

AUGUSTE (PANICS) What can we do? What can we do, chief?

LOUIS Take it easy, old man. Take it easy.

AUGUSTE I-I-I can't! I - just can't!

JEAN Won't do any good to stand here and shake.

LOUIS That's right. Anybody want a cigarette?

AUGUSTE Yes. I'll have one, thank you.

LOUIS Good boy. We've got to keep calm about this thing.

SFX: LIGHTS CIGARETTE

LOUIS Want a light?

SFX: MATCH STRIKES, RATS INCREASE  
THEIR SCREAMING

AUGUSTE (LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY) They don't like the fire, do they? (LAUGHS)

LOUIS Guess not.

AUGUSTE (LAUGHS) Give me another match.

SFX: STRIKES MATCH, RATS INCREASE SCREAMING AGAIN

AUGUSTE (TO THE RATS) You don't like that much, do you?

LOUIS Don't rile them, Auguste.

AUGUSTE (LAUGHING) Give me some more matches. I'll strike them and strike them and strike them until they get scared and go away. (LAUGHS)

LOUIS (DARKLY, STEPPING ON AUGUSTE) They won't go away. Not until...

AUGUSTE Finish it, Chief. Not until -- what?

LOUIS Not until they've been fed.

SFX: SCREAMING OF RATS CONTINUES, CROSSFADES TO SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC

JEAN (NARRATES) You can take just so much horror and then you get used to it. And they WERE interesting to watch, you know. They couldn't understand the glass. They could see us and they could rush at us but that thin invisible barrier held them off, stopped them. From time to time, we caught a glimpse of the rocks below. More rats down

there. Swarming brown velvet in the bright tropical sunlight. And then the tide began to rise. (TO AUGUSTE, WITH A SIGH) If only it'd drown some of them.

AUGUSTE Ship's rats don't drown. (CACKLES NERVOUSLY) No, sir. You can't drown one of them. They're all climbing up the tower.

LOUIS This bunch around us is getting thicker.

JEAN Yeah. What's the time?

AUGUSTE Quarter of six.

LOUIS You've got first watch, Jean.

JEAN Right.

LOUIS Wake me at ten.

JEAN I will.

LOUIS Come along, Auguste.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS AWAY

JEAN (NARRATES) It was getting dark. One side of the room was lit a soft filtered red. Sunset - through the rats. Oh, very pretty. I set the wicks, checked my fuel - and then lit the lamp.

SFX: THE RATS PANIC

JEAN (NARRATES) It caught them, lit them in their gigantic wriggling web of pale,

hairless bellies, twitching red tails, bright eyes. And then I started the rotary motor.

SFX: MOTOR STARTS ... MECHANISM CLICKS ... THE RATS' SHRIEKS RISE UP AND DOWN, LIKE THE DOPPLER EFFECT, AS THE ROTATING LIGHT HITS THEM

JEAN

(NARRATES) The light drove them mad. As she swung slowly and smoothly about, she blinded them in the fierce, stabbing bar of light, moving continually about, ever turning, ever touching, ever moving around and around. And they, twitching and shuddering, eyes flaming when they were struck by the light, the bright light moving. And, behind, on the dark side of the room, so close -- so close I dared not turn my back. But you can't help turning your back when you're in a room made of glass. On the dark side of the room, you couldn't see THEM -- but only their eyes. Thousands of points of blank red light, blinking and twinkling - like the stars of hell.

MUSIC: DRAMATIC TRANSITION

JEAN

Louis relieved me at ten but I didn't get much sleep and when I came up into the gallery early the next morning, there stood Auguste, his back to me. He was bowing to the rats, waving his arms and making a speech.

**AUGUSTE** (FADES IN) My dear, dear audience. I am going to play once again that magnificent role which made me the toast of the Paris theatre. Praylatte, the evil genius of the medieval underworld. I am he who did guide the dark soul of de Rochelle into the nether parts. (CACKLES MANICALLY) Do not be frightened, little children. I will not hurt you. Much!

**JEAN** (NARRATES) He kept turning. I stood, staring at him, horror-struck. But he didn't notice me. The man had gone mad. He kept turning, telling his stories to all the rats, leaving no one out. (TO AUGUSTE) Auguste! Auguste!

**AUGUSTE** (TO JEAN) Ah! Another one. A latecomer. Take a seat on the aisle, dear patron.

**JEAN** Auguste! Stop it! Stop it!

**AUGUSTE** (CONTINUES HIS SPEECH UNDER) [Jinjurray?], the blood-stained monster was my partner in iniquity. Together, we disembowled over four hundred little children, leaving their warm, blood-spattered-- ...

**JEAN** (NARRATES) But he didn't stop. He went on, bowing and scraping to the rats. His big blue eyes rolling and winking, his wild red hair waving about him. I grabbed him by the arms and...

**SFX: SLAP IN THE FACE**

JEAN (NARRATES) ... slapped his face. He looked at me like a child. And then his face screwed up. He looked as though he were about to cry. (HARSHLY, TO AUGUSTE) Go below! Go on!

AUGUSTE (CASUALLY) Oh, very well, then. (TO THE RATS) Later, my dear audience, later. Matinee today!

MUSIC: STINGER

JEAN (NARRATES) Sure, he was crazy. But I guess we all were. A few hours later, he came back up and caught Louis and me teasing the rats. Yes. Sounds horrible? It was fun.

MUSIC: UP FOR A MOMENT

JEAN We would get right up against the glass and make faces at them. It drove them crazy. They would scratch away, trying to get at our eyes. Louis was even cuter about it. He'd pull a piece of bread out of his pocket and press it against the glass.

LOUIS (LAUGHS)

JEAN (NARRATES) The rats would scramble into a solid ball, biting each other, clustering like grapes. From time to time, a whole knot of them would slip and fall the hundred and ten feet to the surf below.

LOUIS Look! Look at the sharks.

JEAN They're eating them.

LOUIS Those sharks are our friends. Ah! Here, here. I'll get another bunch together. (LAUGHS, TO THE RATS) Here, my beauties. Ah, that's it. Pile up! Kill each other! Eh? (LAUGHS)

SFX: RATS SHRIEK AND SCRATCH LOUDLY  
... THEN SUDDENLY FALL AWAY

LOUIS There they go!

JEAN (NARRATES) Auguste joined in, too. Very ingenious, Auguste. He learned that if he spread-eagled himself against the glass, they'd bunch and bundle against his figure. Then he'd leap back--

AUGUSTE Look! My portrait - in rats!

MUSIC: STINGER

JEAN (NARRATES) It went on all day. And then...I was lying in bed. It was about midnight. I was very tired and I was just beginning to fall off to sleep when I became conscious of a new sound.

SFX: AN ODD CRUNCHING NOISE

JEAN (NARRATES) Couldn't figure it at first. I got up, lit the lamp and went to the window. Even as I looked out, I saw one of the panes begin to sag in. They had eaten the wood away!

JEAN (YELLS) Louis! Louis, Come quick!

LOUIS What? What is it?

JEAN They've found a way in! (NARRATES) I held the glass with my hand. Now, they were all going crazy and, assured of the success of this maneuver, were all nibbling away at the wood. Louis ran below and then returned with a large sheet of tin.

SFX: HAMMERING NAILS

JEAN (NARRATES) We spread it against the window and hammered it into place. Even as we did so, we felt the heavy bodies thudding against the other side as the window gave way.

SFX: HAMMERING STOPS

LOUIS There! That ought to hold. If it doesn't, we're done for.

JEAN Rats can't eat tin?

LOUIS No. They can't.

SFX: DISTANT CRASH OF GLASS

JEAN What was that?

LOUIS I don't know. It came from below.

JEAN The storeroom window.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS ON STAIRS . . . RATS SHRIEK LOUDLY

LOUIS They're in! They're swarming up the stairs!

JEAN Drop the trap.

LOUIS Right.

SFX: WOODEN TRAP DOOR DROPS ... TWO NOISY RATS SHRIEK

JEAN Two of them got in.

LOUIS Let's go after them.

SFX: (TWO MEN FIGHT WITH TWO RATS)

JEAN (NARRATES) We didn't have to go after them. They came at us. I leaped to one side and grabbed a marlin spike, swung, and smashed one in mid-air.

SFX: A RAT IS SMASHED

LOUIS (HOLLERS IN PAIN)

JEAN (NARRATES) I whirled to see Louis with the other. It had ripped his hand open and the blood was pouring all over the place. He held his hand aloft and kicked at the snarling rat. I stepped and swung and got him.

SFX: ANOTHER RAT KILLED

LOUIS Oh, my hand! He got my hand!

JEAN That's both of them, Louis. I'll get you something to tie that up.

LOUIS Blood! Look at it! My blood! I'm bleeding!

JEAN Don't worry about, Louis. Here, look, I'll wind this kerchief around it. It'll be okay.

LOUIS (WHIMPERS) Blood...

JEAN (FINISHES TYING) There. There, that's not bad. Just the flesh. (NARRATES) And then I became conscious of another new sound.

SFX: A QUIET MUNCHING NOISE

JEAN (NARRATES) They were gnawing their way through the wooden trap door. I watched the wood, fascinated. And even as I did, it began to give way. And a bristling, whiskery nose showed through. (TO LOUIS) Louis! We've got to go up!

SFX: SCRAMBLING FOOTSTEPS UP THE STAIRS

JEAN (NARRATES) The next level was the living quarters and kitchen. I slammed the trap door.

SFX: ANOTHER WOODEN TRAP DOOR SLAMS SHUT

JEAN (NARRATES) But it, too, was wood.

LOUIS (WHIMPERS, TO HIMSELF) My blood. (TO JEAN) What are we going to do?

JEAN I don't know. They'll be through this one in a minute.

LOUIS The gallery. The trap door in the gallery is metal.

JEAN Good. Come on.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS RUN UP STAIRS ...  
METAL TRAP DOOR SLAMS SHUT

JEAN We made it!

MUSIC: DRAMATIC PUNCTUATION

SFX: SQUEAKING RATS

JEAN (NARRATES) We lay across the trap door, exhausted, while below us, the rats took over the entire tower. I could hear them howling and fighting over our food supply, our water, our leather. And all about us, the others screamed and glared in at us, swayed in a tangled mass, hypnotized by the ever-turning light.

MUSIC: UP FOR EMPHASIS

JEAN By morning, the air in the little room was horrible. Until now, we'd been getting air from the tower below. Now that was sealed off. And so was all our food and water. We lay exhausted, panting, waiting, waiting. And the hours crawled on. I was almost dozing from fatigue when I saw a sight that brought me to, fast.

AUGUSTE (LAUGHING HYSTERICALLY, TO THE RATS)  
Would you like to come in, my beauties?  
Would you? I hold the powers of life and  
death and I can let you in, you know.

JEAN (NARRATES) Auguste was standing by the  
glass and in one hand he held a wrench.

SFX: WRENCH TAPS ON GLASS

JEAN (NARRATES) He was tapping the glass  
gently. Not quite hard enough to break  
it. I eased myself to my feet and  
slowly, very slowly, tiptoed toward him.

AUGUSTE (TO THE RATS) All I have to do is tap  
just a little harder and --

SFX: JEAN TACKLES AUGUSTE AND  
KNOCKS HIM UNCONSCIOUS

JEAN (NARRATES) I found a coil of wire in the  
tool kit and I trussed him up. Fastened  
him to a stanchion in the center of the  
room. Louis was of no help. He lay on  
his side looking at his bloody hand,  
weak and sick as a baby. So there I was,  
a lunatic and a coward for company, and  
all about, watching our little drama,  
the rats.

MUSIC: DRAMATIC EMPHASIS, DUCKS  
UNDER THE FOLLOWING

JEAN The day dragged by. The supply boat  
wasn't due for another twelve days. I  
don't know what they could have done if  
they HAD come. And we had only one way  
of summoning them. That was to shoot off

distress rockets. But the rockets were four floors below. And even if they'd been right there in the gallery, I couldn't've opened a window to fire them.

That night, I tended the light, but its flame was devouring our oxygen. The following day, we lay thirst-tormented, starving, waiting. And the following night, I again tended the light but the small supply of spare wicking we kept in the gallery had become exhausted and quite suddenly, at about midnight, the light went out.

SFX: SQUEAKING RATS

JEAN (NARRATES) There was nothing I could do. Wicks were stored three levels below. Nothing I could do. Nothing. From time to time, I'd strike a match to see the clock.

SFX: MATCH STRIKES ... RATS REACT

JEAN (NARRATES) And when I did, it lit up the million red eyes about us. All about. Watching. Waiting. Below, it had grown quiet. They'd cleaned us out and now they, too, were waiting. All waiting. And then the rats -- quite suddenly -- were silent.

SFX: A LONG MOMENT OF SILENCE

JEAN (NARRATES) And then I heard it.

SFX: DISTANT ... CORNET PLAYS A  
MOURNFUL, PLAINTIVE TUNE

JEAN

(NARRATES) And then I saw the sky. And the stars. The rats were gone. I went to the glass. Out there, on the water, a small freighter -- a banana boat -- showing a few lights, came softly and innocently at us.

Our light was out. They didn't know. I - I wanted to open the windows to call out to them, to warn them somehow. But I was afraid. What if the rats were hiding from me? Tricking me? So I waited.

SFX: DISTANT ... BOAT GROUNDS ON  
REEF

JEAN

(NARRATES) She grounded very softly on a reef not two hundred yards from the key. Grounded so gently that the man playing the cornet -- was he a passenger, crew man off watch? -- didn't even stop playing. They tried washing her back off. I could have told them to save their fuel. The tide was rising, would've floated her free.

And I waited.

SFX: CORNET HITS A SLIGHTLY SOUR  
NOTE ... A LONG MOMENT OF SILENCE

MUSIC: DRAMATIC EMPHASIS

JEAN

(NARRATES) That's all. That's the story. The sun came up and there wasn't a rat on the whole key. Every last one of that

terrible army had left us, gone back to sea -- on their new ship.

Auguste? Insane asylum. He never recovered. And Louis? They took him into Cayenne where he died of blood poisoning from his bite.

(YAWNS, STRETCHES) Yes, that's the whole of it. And if you'll excuse me now, I must go set my traps.

(CHUCKLES) No. No. Mouse traps. No rats in this lighthouse, I should say not.

Life in the lights isn't bad. But sometimes, when I see a strange vessel approaching, I get a little nervous.

Sure. Somewhere on the seas, there's a little banana boat without a crew. That is, without a human crew.

MUSIC: TO A FINISH

ANNOUNCER

Escape is produced and directed by William N. Robson. Tonight we have presented "Three Skeleton Key" by George Toudouze, adapted for radio by James Poe. Featured in the cast were Elliott Reid as Jean. Bill Conrad as Louis. And Harry Bartell as Auguste. Special music was arranged and conducted by Del Castillo.

MUSIC: NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN

HOST CONCLUSION (ACT #2)

HOST

We just listened to "Three Skeleton Key," episode number 102 of *Escape*, broadcast March 17, 1950, starring Vincent Price, legendary for his stage, television, motion picture, and radio appearances.

Price performed "Three Skeleton Key" twice for *Escape*. This March 1950 performance was the first. The second was November 11, 1956, with Price again as "Jean," John Dehner as "Louis," and Ben Wright as "Auguste."

In the opening, you heard the announcer saying this March 1950 performance was in response to [quote] "hundreds of requests" [unquote] for a repeat of an earlier performance. That was November 15, 1949. Elliott Reid voiced the part of "Jean," William Conrad was "Louis," and Harry Bartell was "Auguste."

Frequently cited as the finest radio adventure series ever, *Escape* is significant for drawing from adventure classics and contemporary original scripts to provide listeners a variety of literary experiences.

I hope you enjoyed our double featured focus on *Escape*, and Vincent Price, as examples of excellent radio storytelling.

More information and listening opportunities are available at our website--reimaginedradio dot FM.

MUSIC: RIR THEME FOR BREAK

THE RIR BREAK

MUSIC: RIR THEME. ESTABLISH, THEN  
FADE OUT UNDER THE FOLLOWING.

HOST This is Re-Imagined Radio. I'm John Barber, producer and host. With each episode we explore radio storytelling using voice, sound effects, and music. Here are some examples . . .

SFX: RE-IMAGINED RADIO AUDIO  
TRAILER

HOST More information and listening opportunities are available at our website--reimaginedradio dot fm

Re-Imagined Radio is also available as podcasts. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts, or, our website.

MUSIC: RIR THEME, ESTABLISH, THEN  
DUCK UNDER THE FOLLOWING

HOST CREDITS/CLOSE

HOST This episode was written by John Barber.

Sound Design, music composition, and post-production by Marc Rose.

Graphic design by Holly Slocum with  
Sydney Nguyen.

We produce Re-Imagined Radio with  
support from KXRW-FM (Vancouver,  
Washington) and KXRY-FM (Portland,  
Oregon).

This is John Barber, producer and host.  
Thank you for listening.

**MUSIC: RIR THEME UP, THEN DUCK  
UNDER THE FOLLOWING**

ANNOUNCER CLOSE

**ANNOUNCER**

This is a production of Re-Imagined  
Radio. To learn more, visit our website,  
reimaginedradio (all one word, no  
punctuation) dot FM.

Please join us again for another episode  
of Re-Imagined Radio where we will  
continue our exploration of radio  
storytelling.

**MUSIC: RIR THEME UP, AND TO END.**