



The War for Late Night: When Leno Went Early and Television Went Crazy

Bill Carter

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A dramatic account of the politics and personalities behind NBC's calamitous attempt to reinvent late-night television.

When NBC decided to move Jay Leno into prime time to make room for Conan O'Brien to host the *Tonight* show-a job he had been promised five years earlier-skeptics anticipated a train wreck for the ages. It took, in fact, only a few months for the dire predictions to come true. Leno's show, panned by critics, dragged down the ratings-and the profits-of NBC's affiliates, while ratings for Conan's new *Tonight* show plummeted to the lowest levels in history. Conan's collapse, meanwhile, opened an unexpected door of opportunity for rival David Letterman. What followed was a boisterous, angry, frequently hilarious public battle that had millions of astonished viewers glued to their sets. In *The War for Late Night*, *New York Times* reporter Bill Carter offers a detailed behind-the-scenes account of the events of the unforgettable 2009/2010 late-night season as all of its players- performers, producers, agents, and network executives-maneuvered to find footing amid the shifting tectonic plates of television culture.



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