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Introduction

Everybody needs a hobby. It is all but essential in this rapidly moving world, to have an activity that affords a moment to relax from the normal affairs of the day. Some people play golf, softball, or basketball. Some paint, sculpt, or carve. Still others camp, climb mountains, or surf. Most hobbies provide their relaxation and recreation by separating the hobbyist from the world at large.

I will show you a hobby that provides all the traditional benefits and still allows you to engage the world around you in a unique and exciting way. My hobby of choice is *Radio Monitoring*. Radio monitoring is an exploration and investigation of the radio frequency spectrum. Radio monitoring is tuning between and beyond the three or four broadcast stations you listen to in your car on the way to work. Radio monitoring is hearing things that weren't meant for your ears, but which provide a great deal of excitement anyway.

Virtual reality has become an overused term, describing personal experiences with computers. Virtual reality usually "tricks" the mind into feeling that it is somewhere that it isn't. The experienced Radio Monitor smiles knowingly when the term "virtual reality" is tossed in his or her direction. Radio has been a form of virtual reality since its discovery over a century ago. Virtual reality of radio opens the mind to experiences and knowledge from more distant horizons.

Have you ever dreamed of traveling the world in search of adventure? Most of us have at least daydreamed about exploring exotic places in distant lands. But few of us have the time or money to make regular world wide treks for excitement. We have to find our adventure closer to home. It is neither safe nor smart to chase police cars, fire engines, or emergency service vehicles. Maybe you are curious about how people are affected by a newsworthy event in another state. Your local news broadcast might not be as complete a picture as one from the location where things are actually happening.

Radio monitoring is a unique and affordable adventure. You can experience the events and culture of almost any place on our planet. Enter the radio monitor's world, a place of wonder and excitement by tuning into the virtual reality of the radio frequency spectrum.

Most people's experience with radio is limited to the standard AM and FM broadcast bands found on their car or home radios. Practically, this represents only a tiny portion of the radio frequencies available. There is a vast bandwidth of frequencies within easy and inexpensive reach that can provide countless hours of excitement, education, and enjoyment to anyone with a desire to know more about the world around them. Radio monitoring is both the hobby and the sport of the naturally curious person.

Radio monitoring brings the world to your doorstep. Many countries broadcast specifically for audiences in North America as well as other parts of the world. Would you be surprised to hear that some of these signals can even be heard using that standard AM/FM car radio? Still more signals from foreign lands abound in the vast bandwidth between those fairly small bands of frequencies that make up AM and FM. A large part of the area between the more familiar frequencies is called the Shortwave Band. These signals are available for less than the price of many electronic children's games. Since you opened this book, you probably have at least a mild curiosity about the world of radio monitoring. As you progress through these pages, you will learn how to gain access to the radio frequency spectrum and all its wonders and adventures. I will discuss the types of receivers you will need, the antennas and accessories that will improve your ability to bring the world home, and the book covers all of the major facets of the radio monitoring hobby including how to get into contact with the stations you have heard. You will also learn how to connect with other radio monitors to enhance the fun and enjoyment of your hobby.

Radio monitoring is a multifaceted hobby. This book will give you all of the basic information that will allow you to begin enjoying the world of radio monitoring. If a particular section of the book raises some questions for you, note them and read on because it is likely that what you are looking for is covered in another segment.

The worldwide shortwave radio listening population numbers in the hundreds of millions.

Because radio monitoring is such a wide and varied hobby, you will need information to assist in investigating advanced or specialized areas. You will learn about the many clubs and publications that are available to guide you in the advancement of radio monitoring.

No single book has all the information there is to be shared about the radio hobby. This book is designed to be a practical guide for the beginning listener the "first" word, not the "last." You will gain access to information that will resolve most of the confusion that can stand in the way of full enjoyment as you grow in knowledge of the hobby.

This book will also break down the myths that radio monitoring is expensive or can only be enjoyed by a person with a Ph.D. in Electronics. *Nothing could be farther from the truth!* Compared to other hobby pursuits and interests, radio monitoring is an affordable activity that can be enjoyed by the entire family. It is a hobby for young and old alike. It fits into most budgets, even if a paper route, allowance, or fixed income. This is a hobby where tenacity can beat pocketsful of money. Your skills and equipment can advance at a personal and financially comfortable pace, and you will have fun every step of the way. You already possess 90 percent of what it takes to be successful in this hobby before you buy any equipment. I will point you in the path from beginner to advanced.

Radio monitoring can be a lifelong pursuit. The world is always changing. There are always new signals to hear and new things to discover. If you take advantage of the information that follows, you will develop a sound foundation in the radio monitoring art that will increase your enjoyment through the years, no matter the changes.

In this book I will also try to help you enjoy your beginner's status. There is no need to compare your accomplishments with those of others unless that level of competition appeals to you. This is a hobby where even the most experienced still recall their earliest listening activities with great enthusiasm. You will learn to document your adventures so you can relive your experiences again and again.

In this book I will periodically remind you that radio monitoring is a *hobby*. It's supposed to be *fun*. It is not supposed to give you the same aggravation you get from the salt mines every day. You will discover a hobby that gives a great sense of accomplishment without driving you to total distraction. You will see that I take this subject and myself only as seriously as is needed to convey the point.

We will look primarily at the three most common forms of radio monitoring: **mediumwave** (the traditional AM broadcast band), **shortwave** (the primary frequencies for worldwide radio signals), and **VHF / UHF** (those signals most commonly monitored by a scanning receiver). Each of these differ enough to warrant separate consideration. We will also touch on other radio monitoring experiences into which a beginner might later want to branch.

The radio frequency spectrum covers nearly three thousand billion Hertz (Hz). The standard AM/FM car radio covers less than one thousandth of all these possible frequencies.

I have been a radio monitor for more than 25 years. I've tracked down signals from "DC to Daylight" (a common term that suggests most of the RF spectrum). In that time I've monitored wars and rumors of wars. I've heard the rise and fall of nations. I've eavesdropped on the activities of spies and international criminals. I've enjoyed radio programming from every region of the United States and numerous foreign lands. I've tapped into the excitement in my own back yard on the public safety bands. I've never lost the excitement that comes from hearing a new signal. By way of radio monitoring I have traveled the planet, gotten to know the people of the world in unique and exciting ways. Any journey is more fun when it is shared. I welcome you along. We're going to have fun.