

Tightbeam 364

January 2025



The Girl Who Never Was
By Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 364

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What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine, not the novel and anthology fanzine, but the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, ...

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Anime

Drop Kick on my Devil! Anime Review by Jessi Silver



Yurine Hanazono is a college student who summons Jashin-chan, a demon from the underworld. Now they must live together in a run-down apartment in Tokyo's Jinbōchō district. If Yurine dies, Jashin-chan gets to go back to the underworld, so she constantly plots to kill Yurine. – ANN

Episode 1 Summary: Jashin-chan is an evil demon who was unwillingly

summoned to Earth by Yurine, a human being with even more terrifying qualities. Jashin-chan wants nothing more than to make her way back home to Hell, a journey which can only occur if she's released by her master. This means one thing – if she can kill Yurine, she'll be free to go. Jashin-chan comes up with scheme after hare-brained scheme to take Yurine out of the picture – one time she plots to distract Yurine with a favorite movie and beat her with a crowbar, and a few days later she's got plans to stun her with a stun gun and then stab her to death. All of Jashin-chan's plots involve the forced participation of her other demon friends, most of whom are actually pretty nice people and don't necessarily want to enable her (but who are thus easily-manipulated). Yurine is also constantly one step ahead of Jashin-chan's plans, and her counter-attacks are profoundly brutal.

I'm not often entirely put off by slapstick comedy; it's not my favorite and it doesn't usually tickle me unless combined in some way with other gag styles. What does put me off, however, is extreme violence. Occasionally I'll find an anime to be so otherwise compelling that I'll suffer through some blood and guts, but the older I get the less I can tolerate outright brutality for no good reason. This episode is jam-packed with slicing, dicing, blunt force trauma, cannibalism, electrocution... I could go on. The show makes a joke out of the fact that large portions of many scenes are hidden behind a censoring mosaic as Jashin-chan's body gets repeatedly mangled. If I'm to look past such profound gore and gleeful violence, there has to be something at the heart of a series that would be likely to make the experience worthwhile, because I have physical reactions to body fluids and dismemberment.



Impressions: CW: This episode contains extreme violence used for comedic purposes.

Drop Kick on my Devil! is most certainly not a show with any deep moral core or profound message; it's a gag anime about two very mean-spirited young women doing whatever's within their own power to make each-other's lives miserable. It's like the anime equivalent of putting two angry wasps in a jar, shaking it up, and seeing which one ends up stinging the other to death all for the sake of laffs and yuks. I think there are some people who get a kick out of watching two horrible people duke it out,



reveling in the shock value of seeing the characters escalate a feud beyond all boundaries of reason. There is something to be said for being able to witness bad people “getting what they deserve” I think, especially when there are people walking around in our world having done terrible things without being made to take responsibility. For me, though, I’ve started to experience frustration and sadness with this kind of material.

I’m perhaps just exhausted from hearing about bad behavior all day on the news and don’t have the energy to deal with a bunch of cartoon characters trying to slice each-other in half with chainsaws.

This first episode introduces a surprising number of questions and variables for how simplistic the premise of the show is. Part of the issue I have is that there’s very little introduction to what’s happening; we don’t know why Yurine summoned Jashin in the first place besides the fact that she’s the type of person that seems occult-like in anime visual shorthand (you really have to watch out for those gothic lolitas – I know from personal experience). It’s clear that, despite being evil, some demons are quite friendly and accommodating; why Jashin-chan is so foul-tempered and violent as compared to Minos and Medusa, two of her friends (?), is kind of a mystery (though being summoned and bound to someone against your will would likely make you a little bit salty, I suppose). To the same point, why do Minos and Medusa spend any time



around Jashin-chan and Yurine? And I’m guessing this is just me, but if I’d summoned forth an evil entity and it became clear that the entity wasn’t happy with the arrangement (to the point that they were reacting with violence), I’d probably just give up and let them go rather than incur their additional wrath. Why Yurine is so incredibly sadistic and cruel, or why her cruelty is supposed to read as funny, is beyond me.

You can’t zap someone with an electric razor.

To be honest, I think what tipped the scales for me really has to do with my reading of the nature of the violence. To me, it feels like Jashin and

Yurine are locked in a mutually-abusive relationship, with Yurine the one coming across as the worse one of the two of them. It’s not just because of the physical fighting, but more the fact that Yurine is always a step ahead and consciously manipulative towards Jashin, who’s doing what she can to try to leave her situation. There’s a scene late in the episode after Yurine has electrocuted Jashin with a stun-gun and chopped part of her tail off to put in the hot-pot (Jashin-chan has regenerative abilities but this is still squicky to me), that she offers Jashin some food. She then electrocutes her again after offering it. That scene in particular really bothered me – toying with someone who’s already half-destroyed after a particularly painful row seems terribly sinister and cruel to me.

I’m very sad that I don’t have many nicer things to say about the show, because this first episode was otherwise very nice to look at (at least when I could read between the blood streaks). The character designs are pleasantly older-school, especially around the eyes; they read a little bit more like early-2000’s designs which weren’t quite so rounded-off. As a J-fashion enthusiast

and hobbyist I also appreciate the fact that Yurine is wearing what I'd classify as a legitimate lolita-fashion outfit (albeit fairly old-school). I get unreasonably frustrated when characters are described as "gothic lolitas" when in fact their costumes just have some extra lace and aren't shaped or sized correctly. The overall animation quality is very consistent as well.

While I think readers might want me to go off on more of a rant, I think it best to say that I don't really find this comedy funny and the content just isn't for me. I think for some viewers the extremeness of the characters' interactions and the clearly over-the-top violence are just the type of comedic material they enjoy, and I get that; I think that a good portion of comedy, no matter what style, is about laughing at the misfortune of others. When a character relationship seems to have no benefits to those in it and the interactions escalate from "giving each-other crap" to "literally trying to kill one-another," though, I can no longer sympathize enough to make it worth my while.

Pros: The character designs have a slightly old-school feel and the animation is solid. Yurine is an accurate gothic lolita.

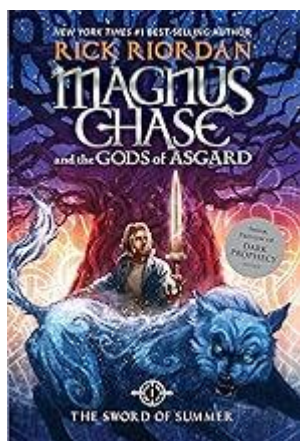
Cons: The comedic elements are incredibly violent and mean-spirited and sometimes come across as abusive. The visuals of blood and such are very extreme.

Grade: D+

Books

Rick Riordan's Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard Book 1: The Sword of Summer Review by Jim McCoy

Okay, so maybe I'm a schmo. I have, and use, a Kindle app. Even books that authors submit for review get read in Kindle if possible because it's easy to use and it can keep track of things for me. They also have an achievement list, and I'm a former World of Warcraft player who had well over twenty thousand achievement points. I mean, it's just my thing. And when I saw that there was an achievement called "Goodreads Choice Awards" and I saw that it was the last achievement I needed to have a perfect quarter, and that there were books I could get with my Kindle Unlimited subscription, well...



Yeah, I didn't really have a choice. I mean, it might look like I did, but Achievement Whore gonna Achieve. (Yes, they really do call them Achievement Whores in game.) I had no choice.

And, as sad as it sounds, I hadn't checked out anything by Rick Riordan although I know he's huge and I love young adult novels. So when I saw that Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard, Book One: The Sword of Summer was one of the books listed I decided to check it out. This was the Percy Jackson guy, right?

I'm glad I did. That Riordan guy can write. The Sword of Summer was a

good time. It's got a little of all of my favorite stuff and, with Marvel having screwed up Norse mythology so badly, it's not like I had to worry about people getting confused by the inconsistencies; What they knew was already scragged. It wasn't going to get worse.

Riordan's sense of humor is top-notch. Seriously, *The Summer Sword* had me cracking up in parts. The two bums out to defend their friend with rubber ducks and a traffic sign. Riordan's take on the squirrel that lives in Yggdrasil was epic. Fishing with rotten pig heads was hilarious. I could go on. If you're looking for super serious look somewhere else, but if you're looking for a good story with a laugh track (think the first *Austin Powers* movie), it's here. This book is a straight up good time.

The appearance of modern technology and philosophy in a book about a battle involving the ancient Norse religion is really well handled and sometimes achingly funny. I'm pretty sure one of my ribs almost popped out of joint at one point. Not to spoil too much, but you haven't lived until you've read about one of the Aesir giving a Powerpoint presentation on self actualization. That was straight up epic. Movies and big screen TVs in Valhalla were amazing as well.

In spite of the humor, though, *The Summer Sword* is a book with a solid storyline. There is a definite goal and, while the route to do the needful doesn't always appear clear, what happens along the way happens in a logical, easy (and enjoyable) plot to follow. Things get a little unpredictable at times, but Riordan does just enough foreshadowing that it makes sense.

The action sequences are top notch and this was something I was kind of worried about. The humor was pretty heavy and I was concerned that any fighting would be a little slapsticky (which is TOTALLY a word. I just made it up.) and not believable. Outside of one time that I already mentioned, and that makes sense in retrospect, the action sequences were well thought out and executed. Riordan somehow managed to take the characters in *The Sword of Summer* and their place in the universe and not make them either Charlie Chaplin or Clark Kent. I was impressed.

The theme of friendship is strong enough in *The Sword of Summer* to please even the most ardent Harry Potter fan. I would know. I am one. Some of the friendships here have a longer history than Harry's friendship with Ron and Hermione in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Some don't. All feel right though. There is a sense of shared danger that binds these characters together. These are characters you can depend on. People that have your back when you need it, and I respect that.

And respect is a big thing for me because I can't read a book if I can't respect the characters. I don't like spending time with people I don't like and trust. I've been through some things. I can assure you that I enjoyed my time with the cast of *The Sword of Summer*. These are good people.

And maybe the easiest character to respect in this entire book is Magnus Chase himself. Magnus grew up in a rich family, ended up living under a bridge and does as much as he can to do the right thing. He feels overwhelmed at times, and so have I, but he never gives up. He always tries to do what's right. He is sometimes confused about what path he should take, but it's for the right reasons. If one wishes to do the right thing it's necessary to know what the right thing is. Magnus is a modern day teenager caught up in a war between the Gods of Asgard and the giants. He knows some of the stories, but he's not sure how things are going to go for him or

what side he needs to support at first. The Asgardians are supposed to be the good guys, but are they?

Magnus has to trust his instincts. The fact that he has lived on the streets is helpful here because he knows enough to not trust everyone. His lack of bitterness works in his favor as well, because he manages to keep his head clear enough to think. When his lack of skill and knowledge work against him and force him to turn to others for help he has a knack for making the right choices. He somehow, somehow, found a method of controlling the Sword of Summer to do what he needed to as well. He's got moxie. I like this kid. I'll be reading more about him soon.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Magic Ropes

Magazines Reviews by Tom Feller

Khoreo Vol. 3, No. 2

I had read the Vol. 3, No. 1 of this e-zine, because it was nominated in the semi-prozine category, but skipped Nos. 2 & 3, because I ran out of time. No. 2 consisted of six stories. The protagonist of "The Abode of the Palms" by Karim Kattan travels to the world of the jinn for the purpose of sacrificing their younger brother because second children are prohibited. The title character "Sartor" by Tanvir Ahmed is a disembodied head. The main character in "Umeboshi" by Rebecca Nakaba has received a chain e-mail warning of a red tide.

The world of "Come Back, Crocodile Bird" by M.S. Dean is flooding, and the family of Arnaz, the main character, have reincarnated as friendly crocodiles. Her mother has disappeared, and her grandmother spends most of her time in a dream state.

My favorite story in this issue was "Memories of Memories Lost" by Mahmud El Sayed, and the premise is that the Earth has been conquered by aliens we call "Crablegs". After disarming us and disabling all mass communications, they levy an unusual tax on everyone, our memories. Ahmed not only has to pay his own tax but also has to use more of his own memories to pay the tax of his father who has dementia.

Memories are also important in "Kwong's Bath" by Angela Liu in which the title character has been chosen to receive some sort of upgrade surgery so that she can have a better life. However, the side effects of giving her the ability to see ghosts and the loss of memories complicate things.

Khoreo Vol. 3, No. 3

This issue of the zine consisted of three stories. "The Blue Glow" by Lisa Hosokawa takes place immediately in Japan after World War II. The main character is a failed Japanese suicide-pilot who tries to return to his home in Hiroshima and finds only ghosts.

Dragon riders and their dragons have a psychic connection in "Dragonsworn" by L. Chan and is set in two timelines. Two of the characters are in both timelines. Professor Chao was a spotter for young people with the potential to become dragon riders in the earlier timeline and an aca-

demic researcher of dragons in the latter one. Da Kai had been a dragon rider in the earlier timeline, which took place during a war, and is now a ranger in a dragon preserve. It was my favorite of the three.

“The Cursing of Herman Willem Daendels” takes place in 1808-09 Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). The title character is the colony’s governor-general who built a road using conscripted labor. The main character is a mother whose son died during the road’s construction and seeks revenge.

Manga

Shiver: Selected Stories by Junji Ito (Viz, 2024) Review by Heath Row, Editor of StfAmateur

This collection of horror manga stories by Junji Ito was first published by Viz Media in 2017; this is its 13th printing. It was first issued in Japan in 2015. The collection includes 10 stories, one of them a shorter piece, “Fashion Model: Cursed Frame,” that relates to another in the volume, “Fashion Model.”

Compared to Gyo (T&T #111), I much preferred this volume—though I also enjoyed the longer work, as well. Ito’s work resonates strongly in shorter form, and over the course of the collection, he’s able to offer many more ideas and concepts to tickle the brain stem. (“Greased” is particularly effective.) I will seek out more of his short work with enthusiasm and interest.

The pieces in this book feature haunting music and mysterious records (“Used Record”), a jade carving that causes holes to appear in one’s skin (“Shiver”), a horrific magazine model (“Fashion Model”), death by strangulation (“Hanging Blimp”), domineering puppets (“Marionette Mansion”), a bewitching artist’s model (“Painter”), the sense of time travel while sleeping (“The Long Dream”), a strong desire to procreate (“Honored Ancestors”), and the effect of living in a oily home (“Greased”).

Each item is followed by editorial commentary by Ito, as well as a reproduction of his preliminary notes and sketches. He discusses his inspiration, life events at the time, where the piece originally appeared (such as Halloween magazine), and other topics. References include the Swingle Singers, spiracles, fashion magazines, dreams, the novelist Katsuhiko Takahashi, and the director’s cut of The Exorcist.

While much of the work in this collection focuses on the horribly fantastic—horror, I suppose—the pieces I enjoyed most, including “Used Record,” “Shiver,” and “Greased,” are quieter and more gentle in their approach. At times, Ito’s work reminds me of the short fiction of Haruki Murakami: darkly fantastic, but almost dreamily or sleepily so.

Viz offers other short story collections by Ito: Frankenstein, Smashed, Lovesickness, Deserter, Alley, Tombs, and Soichi. If they’re all as good as this volume, there’s plenty of excellent reading ahead.

Movies

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Review by Chris Nuttall, Editor The Chrishanger

I was not expecting to like Sonic the Hedgehog when my sons insisted on watching it (again and again and again). I grew up playing the early Sonic games and reading Sonic the Comic, and I admit to a great deal of affection for them, but the later games and takes on the character did not impress me. Worse, Hollywood has a long history of taking franchises and screwing them up because the writers don't understand why they became popular in the first place. The live-action Transformers movies are perfect examples of this process – the giant robots, rather than the human tagalongs, are the stars and having any major human characters is a bad idea.



Sonic the Hedgehog, of course, has always had one major human character – Dr. Robotnik – and a handful of others, but I feared disaster when I heard the story was going to be set on Earth and involve several major human characters. This was not a good move on their part, I thought, but it worked better than expected. Not ideally – if it was up to me, I would have taken the original story and put that on the big screen instead – but it wasn't a complete disaster. Indeed, the movie did so well that they green-lit a sequel. My sons and I went to watch it last week.

A year or so after the events of Sonic the Hedgehog, Sonic is living with Tom and his wife in Green Hills, unaware that Dr Robotnik has formed an alliance with Knuckles to find the long-gone Master Emerald and take revenge on Sonic. (Robotnik, true to his game persona, intends to betray Knuckles as soon as they find the emerald.) Sonic is saved by Tails and the duo set off to find the emerald themselves, only to find themselves hunted by human authorities and captured, too late to stop Robotnik from using the emerald to turn himself into a near-god. Knuckles and Sonic save each other's lives and team up to stop Robotnik before all is lost ...

The story works better, if you ask me, than the first movie because all the pieces are firmly in place. The majority of the action flows smoothly, as one would expect from a Sonic-themed movie, although there is a nasty bit of padding in the middle that would have been better off removed. The characters have also shown a degree of growth, even Robotnik; he admits, after spending months on his own, that he misses at least some human company. There's also the more clear homage to the games, including Robotnik's giant robot – a cross between the Death Egg Boss of Sonic 2 and the Titanium Monarch of Sonic Mania and the chaos emeralds themselves. And the friendships of the three aliens – Sonic, Tails and Knuckles – is very much the heart of the story. Knuckles even starts his change of heart after watching Sonic risk his life to save Tails.

Special mention is due to Jim Carrey, who brings Robotnik to life in a manner that is both hammy and evil. This version of Robotnik is a fascinating character, a mad genius who is crazy-prepared for almost anything. (Having used the Master Emerald to create and power his giant robot, he makes sure to add an emergency power system for when the emerald is stolen away from him.) His relationship with Agent Stone is a little more developed in this movie (as Ro-

botnik has clearly learnt he needs Stone (or someone)) and his enmity with Sonic is front and centre. Carrey may lack the girth of the video game Robotnik, but he is otherwise pretty much perfect for the role. It is also fair to mention that Idris Elba, who I thought was an odd choice to voice Knuckles, does a very good job.

The movie does suffer from one major side trip that really should have been eliminated (or at least cut down to a handful of seconds). Tom and Maddie Wachowski (Sonic's adoptive parents) take a trip to attend Rachel's (Maddie's sister) wedding, where they meet the bridegroom for the first time. I had bad vibes the moment I saw Randall and I knew there was something wrong with him, but for the entire wedding to be nothing more than a trap for Sonic ... It's great to see Maddie and Rachel team up to save Sonic, and Rachel teaching Randall a lesson is comedy gold (if you like that sort of thing, which I don't) but it feels like something out of a very different movie. It shouldn't have been included in this one.

Overall, however, Sonic the Hedgehog 2 works very well. The storyline moves along well, the humour is generally very good (although some elements are a little cringe), the actors (both live action and voice) do their parts very well and overall, the movie is well worth a watch. The handful of weaknesses do not detract from the rest of the movie ...

... And my sons loved it. What more can I say?

Gattaca

Review by Heath Row, Editor of StfAmateur

I watched this 1997 dystopian sf thriller DVR'd on Portuguese television with Portuguese subtitles. While I've been aware of the movie for some time—and while I'm pretty sure I've seen it previously—I'd forgotten much of it. The cast is quite impressive, including Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, Jude Law, Dean Norris, Gore Vidal, Tony Shalhoub, Alan Arkin, Ernest Borgnine, and others.

It surprised me that the movie wasn't actually based on a book. Its plot and trapping resonate with the work of writers such as Philip K. Dick and similar writers, but the screenplay was original. (You can access the script at <https://tinyurl.com/Gattaca-script>.) Commentators online compare the film to Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World* and Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.



In part, the movie is about efforts underway to hit a window necessary to send a spacecraft to, I believe, Mars. That window is only open every 70 years, so time is of the essence. That leads to a film noir-like murder mystery in which the former director of the program is found dead, killed by an unknown assailant.

All of that takes place in a near-future society in which people are genetically engineered or screened, only the most "perfect" obtaining positions of importance or power, and those deemed less so serving as an economic underclass. A young man, played by Hawke, has obtained a new identity, working in complicity with Law's character to join the launch crew.

Genetic testing and surveillance is widespread, and employees are often subject to blood and urine tests to confirm that they are acceptable or invalid. (It just struck me that there is a dual meaning to this term: not valid, and invalid in the sense of recovering from an injury—like Law’s character in his wheelchair.)

Gattaca is an excellent movie. Space travel serves as window dressing to what is otherwise a workplace drama and murder mystery. The tenor and tone are dark and foreboding, the noir mystery elements compelling, and the narrative commentary on societal structures, ableism, opportunities, employment options, surveillance, body autonomy, and other topics thought provoking. If you haven’t seen Gattaca in a while, it’s worth returning to. A Showtime series entered pre-production last year, so perhaps more along these lines will hit the small screen again soon.

Predestination

Review by Heath Row, Editor of StfAmateur

How have I not heard about or seen this 2014 Australian movie—titled *Predestinado* in Portuguese—before now? How did it take me recording it on Portuguese television, subtitled, to finally become aware of it—and see it? Similar to Gattaca, above, the movie stars Ethan Hawke and is surprisingly good.



Part of the reason might be that it’s based on a Robert A. Heinlein short story, “All You Zombies...,” which appeared in the March 1959 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. I’ve yet to read the story, but I’m poised to once I distribute this week’s APA-L. (It’s currently 9:32 p.m. GMT, Friday, Nov. 22, so I should get this to you soon.)

Predestination is a story about a secretive agency tasked with solving problems. It’s a time travel story. It’s a convoluted what-the-heck-is-happening tale similar to *Dark* on TV, *Memento*, or *Fight Club*. It’s a sympathetic consideration of gender reassignment, as well as writing for confessional magazines. (The pulp elements of the movie are a lot of fun.) And it’s a movie based on a Heinlein story! Hawke and Sarah Snook are both excellent in what are effectively dual roles.

Searching eFanzines online, I found very little contemporary fanzine discussion of the movie. Bruce Gillespie’s *SF Commentary* mentions it several times in 2015-2016, and he includes a related news item in a 2014 issue of *Treasure*. Wolf von Witting lists it in *Clockwise #2016’s “Best SF-Films by Year,”* which is a very useful item. Turning to Fanac.org, I find mentions in *The MT Void* (Vol. 36 #21 in 2017), the 2015 *Sasquan’s Convention Guide* and *Sasq-Watch #5*, and... *SF Commentary*.

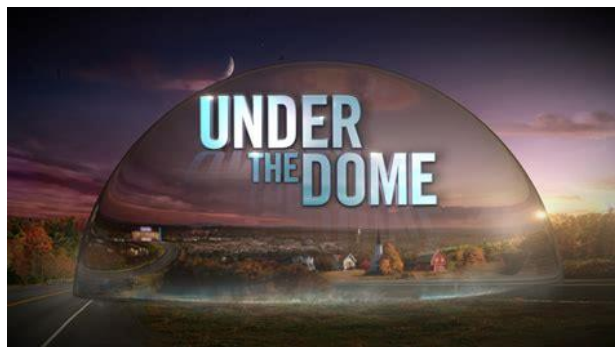
If you haven’t seen *Predestination*, please do so. It’s a very good movie, even if the first 45 minutes are almost entirely back story exposition, and I’d suggest that it’s even an important movie. It should not be the sleeper hit it seems to be. Watch the movie, read the story—in whichever order you prefer—and tell a friend to do the same.

Television

CBS's Under the Dome

Review by Jim McCoy

Under the Dome is the rarest of the rare: A Science Fiction TV series that is entertaining, exciting and got to finish its full run despite not having the word "Star Trek" in the title. (And listen



I've been a Trek fan since forever. I'm just saying that, other than TOS, Trek has gotten a lot of episodes for most of its series where other shows don't. I'm right.) It's a really cool show, despite being a bit on the weird side. I'm a huge Sci-Fi nerd and I'm the one saying that.

I don't want to get too far into the plot of the show. I'm not big on doing spoilers in general and this show has a lot of surprises that you deserve to enjoy for yourself. Lord knows that I

did. I will say that no matter how long this show goes on, no matter how weird it gets, it's never more than five minutes from getting even weirder. Seriously, strangeness abounds.

I mean, Under the Dome is based on a Stephen King novel and I'm pretty sure all of those are weird. I say "pretty sure" because, although I've seen a ton of movies based on his books, the only thing I've ever read by Stephen King was his book On Writing. I'm not sure I learned as much about writing as I should have, but even this dude's life has been weird in spots. Imagine writing a book like Cujo, that sold like crazy and got a movie and not even being able to remember it because you were riding the white horse. Crazy.

Even as weird as it is, though, it's still a believable tale if you can accept that the town of Chester's Mill was surrounded one day by an invisible, impenetrable and indestructable dome. What follows is some of the best tropes from post-apocalyptic literature and some of the awesome characterization every Stephen King movie seems to have. Seriously, it almost feels like I've met some of these people.

At first no one knows what caused the dome, where it came from or how it is being powered. Things are revealed over the course of the series and that's where a lot of the weirdness comes from. It's not just the causes that are weird though. Sometimes it's the method of answering the questions or, indeed, the way that people come across the right question to ask.

There is a lot going on politically in the town of Chester's Mill and I don't want to get into all of it, but it will give you whiplash. No one knows who to trust. No one knows who to turn to. Then favorites start to emerge and things get crazy. The whole town turns into one conspiracy theory come true after another and each one weirder than the last. Sworn enemies in one episode are reluctant allies the next and soon best friends before eventually selling each other out and going back to enmity a few episodes later.

The thing is that it all makes sense in context. Every crazy moment is based on something that came before and leads to a logical outcome. I love that about this series. Every time I find myself saying "HOW COULD THAT POSSIBLY HAPPEN!?!?!?" The answer becomes "Well, first this happened, then that thing did and after the other thing, it couldn't have gone any other way." There's a reason that King has sold more copies than anyone this side of JK Rowling and it's not because he can't carry a plot.

The special effects for the series are really good for TV too. There are some shooting stars and several disasters, and they all look beautiful. I'd kind of like to see modern movies go back to looking like *Under the Dome* and spending the money on writers that CBS did for this series. This is a plot and character driven story. The effects add to it, but they're not what the show is based on. *Under the Dome* is what *The Flash* and *Avatar: The Way of Water* could have been if they had made an effort to do more than just look cool.

I want to talk about some of my favorite characters here, but I can't because I'd spoil too much. Trying to talk about what a character is like in a story like *Under the Dome* without talking about what they go through is basically impossible. I guess I'll just say to watch out for people with the following names: Big Jim, Junior, Barbie, Nori, and Julia. Those are some of my favorites because reasons. And one of my favorite actresses of all time shows up in Season Three, but saying who would risk telling too much. Let's just say I was happy to see her.

And it's really the acting that makes *Under the Dome* as much as anything else does. The good guys are good guys, at least until they're the bad guys. The bad guys are bad, at least until they're the good guys. And Big Jim is the consummate politician at all times, even when he's doing no-politicky stuff. He's also a used car salesman with all that that implies. I'll shut up now. You'll thank me later.

Wait. That didn't come out right.

Whatever.

The whole series is only thirty-nine episodes so it's an easy binge. I got through it in basically a week although a lot of that was being stuck in the house not feeling good for pretty much an entire weekend. I'm glad I did though. Other than the fact that I almost didn't get my laundry done that weekend at least. I kind of got wrapped up in what I was watching and lost track of little details like what the day and time were.

And that's probably the best thing about the series. It's so good, so weird, so believable and you care so much about the characters (whether it's because you want to see them succeed or because you want to see them catch a bullet being a separate issue) that you can get lost and not want to find your way back.

My one regret about watching *Under the Dome* is that I'll never get to watch it for the first time again. I really loved this show. Here's hoping we get more book to TV show translations, because this is how you can truly do justice to a long book with rich content.

Cooking by Famous Authors

Allspice Cedar Sanderson

I really wasn't sure what to expect from the spices advent calendar. My past experiences with advent calendars has been when they were given to my children, and each day held a piece of chocolate, which was fun for them and me... I haven't done one for years but when I saw the spice calendar at Adagio Teas I knew I had to try it.

The first day I opened in the morning, really looking forward to seeing what I'd gotten - it was so hard to guess what the condition of the spices would be, what form they would take. How exotic would they be (I guessed not very...)?

The little packet is well sealed. It contained 8 grams of ground spice, which is roughly a table-spoonful. At the rate Allspice is generally consumed, that is several recipes worth! I immediately thought of baked goods, perhaps a cake, and then realized I wanted to do something different with it. Something more unexpected.

Allspice is a classic 'sweet' spice, warming, fragrant, and generally combined with other spices like cinnamon, ginger, and cloves in baked goods here in the US. However, there are other things you can do with it!

I used it in two ways today, but we'll only eat one of them... today.

Allspice Pickled Eggs

First, hardboil a dozen eggs. I highly recommend the instantpot method if you can.

In a small saucepan, combine:

- 1 c water
- 1 c apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp salt
- 5-6 cloves of garlic (I sometimes use up the itty-bitty cloves in this, since you don't have to peel them)
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 hot peppers (I used jalapeno)
- 1 tsp whole cloves
- 1 tsp whole allspice
- 6-7 green cardamom pods
- 1 tsp coriander

Bring this to a boil, remove from heat, and set aside to cool slightly while you peel your eggs.

Place the peeled eggs into a jar which you can close tightly (I like a quart or larger mason jar with a wide mouth). Pour the pickling liquid over them. Refrigerate for a week before eating, turning the jar over daily to move the spices and ensure all eggs are immersed.

I also wanted to eat allspice today, and as dinner plans involved pesto chicken, I opted to pair that with roasted veggies.

Allspiced Veg

Preheat oven to 400F and have a heavy baking pan ready.

- 3 turnips, cubed
- 2 carrots, cut into roughly 1" sections
- 8 oz radishes, halved
- 8 oz mushrooms, halved

Put the prepared vegetables into a large bowl and toss to coat with:

- Olive oil
- 1 tsp allspice
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1/2 tsp cumin
- 1/4 tsp cayenne
- 2 tsp salt
- pepper

Drizzle a little more olive oil on the pan, then spread the veg out in an even layer. Bake for about an hour, until fork-tender, carefully stirring every fifteen to twenty minutes.

Ready to go into the oven!

Ready to eat!

The sweetness of roasted vegetables plays very well with allspice, and the earthy notes of cumin with just a touch of cayenne heat all work nicely together. This is a very good mix for roasted root vegetables.

I did use some of the calendar spice, and it was fresh and fragrant to my nose. I opted to use whole berries from my own spice rack for the pickles, as they will do better in that application. I hope this has you considering allspice in a new light!



Kiara and the Dragon
by Tiffanie Gray