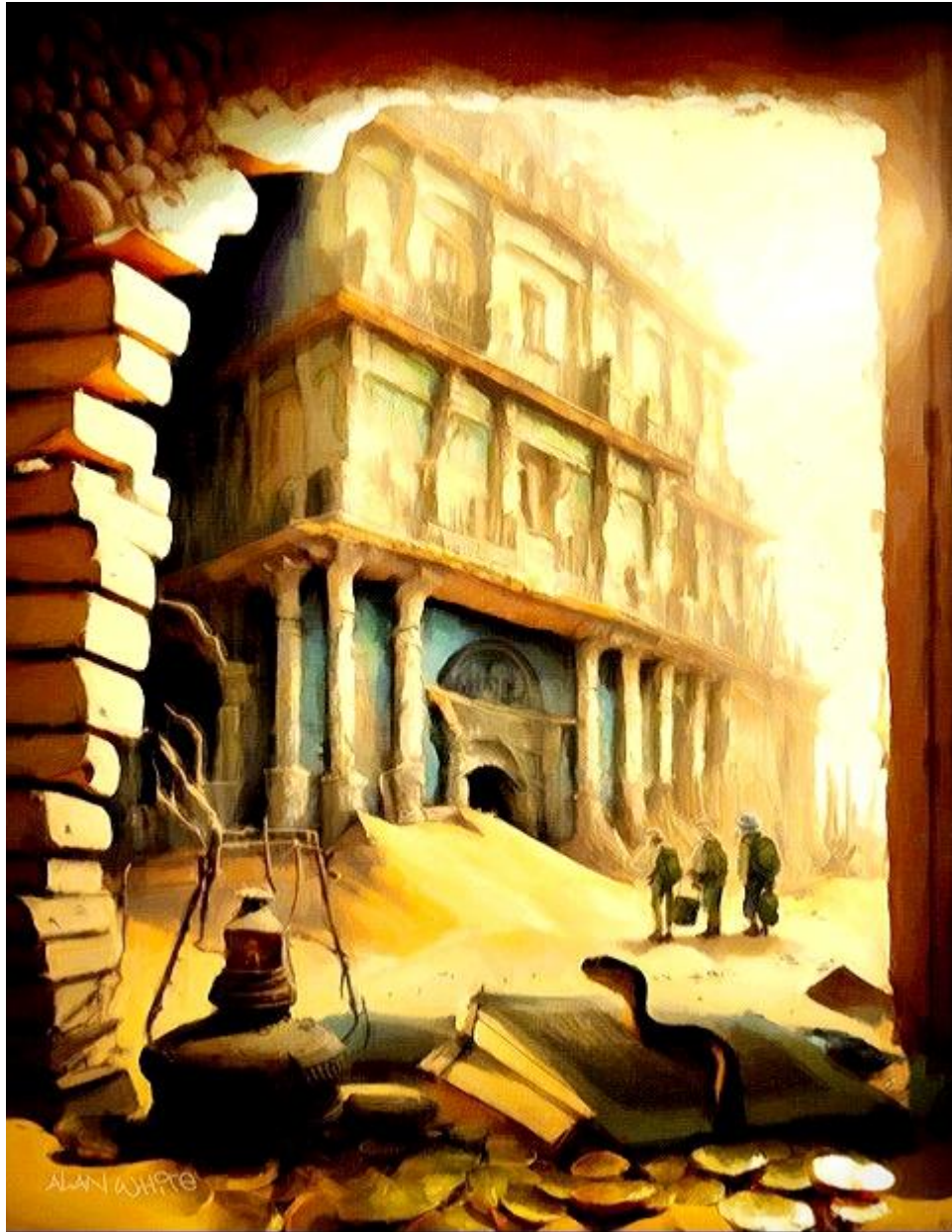


Tightbeam 361

October 2024



The Hidden Library by Alan White

# Tightbeam 361

October 2024

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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# Table of Contents

## Art

Front Cover ... The Hidden Library by Alan White

Back Cover ... Floating Isle by Tiffanie Gray

## Letters

4 ... Jose Sanchez

4 ... Lloyd Penney

## Anime

5 ... Mother of the Year by Jessi Silver

## Books

8 ... Hardwired by Walter Jon Williams ... Review by Heath Row

## Comics

9 ... ELITE Asks "Is Superman Relevant?" ... Analysis by Jason P. Hunt

## Movies

10 ... Dr. Giggles ... Review by Heath Row

## SerCon

11 ... Alonzo Deen Cole Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.

## Television

14 ... CBS's Under the Dome ... Review by Jim McCoy

## Food of Famous Authoress

16 ... Carrot Cake from Cedar Sanderson

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## Letters

Hi, George and Jon,

I just want to add this in respect to a story that I illustrated for John Thiel a few ions ago (that is now an official Tightbeam cover) "Flash & Sam Meet the Rapper", is actually the story's official title that I illustrated the cover for.

The actual title I named my drawing afterwards is : "Medusa Magic". So much more compact and delightful- I think.

Later, Jose Sanchez

Dear George and Jon:

I know I got Tightbeam 360 just the other day, but I am rapidly catching up on all writing and editing commitments, and next up is issue 360 already. Let's see what I can come up with at short notice...

I think it was Steven Baldassarra who told me about Taral's passing...the notice arrived on my Facebook page. I had been told that the word 'Taral' referred to Irish kings, but I have my doubts about that old story now. I am thinking that perhaps someone could put out a Great White Zine 2, as a tribute zine to Taral's talents in art and writing. I am sure he had plans for more zines, which we will now never see, and we are the lesser for that.

Destroying favorite franchises is all totally subjective. If I had \$5 for every critique I have seen of series I've watched over the years...well, I'd be quite rich. There are artistic versions, and attempts to recreate, and just tell an interesting story, and I have enjoyed them all, but when some say this isn't REAL (insert title of show), they cut themselves off from a continuation of the story. Stop trying to spoil it for others! I will agree, the quality of writing varies, but the attempt to express ideas must be made.

I've never met George Clayton Johnson, but his face is so familiar through seeing pictures of him with people like Rob Sawyer over the years. I am sure I have seen most of his teleplays for The Twilight Zone, and I will check my copies of Gamma to see if he is there.

Our next destination is Niagara Falls, New York, for the World Fantasy Convention next month, about five weeks away as I write. As we did at the NASFiC in nearby Buffalo, we will have a table promoting Amazing Stories, and selling back issues of the magazine, and of our books. I will have issues of my Best of 2023 book available. Who knows what else we may have! We also have plans to go to Loscon 50...no table, but there may still be some opportunities.

Wish I could have whipped up more for you, but I have been achy and tired since the beginning of this past weekend, but bed sounds pretty good right now. I hope to do a better job with the next issue.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

## Anime

### Mother of the Year

By Jessi Silver



Tousen's standard, everyday look.

Happy Mothers Day, everyone. I thought it might be fun to look over a past year or so of anime viewing and pick out one of my favorite mother (or mothering-type) characters.

I know a lot of blogs and news outlets like to do top-ten lists in these cases, but the fact is that anime mothers who actually have significant story-important roles in anime aren't that common so most of those lists tend to be very similar. My arbitrary criteria for my post was to pick out a mother who was active, important, and/or memorable in some way within a series I watched that was broadcast somewhere within the past year (loosely – since this is the first one I'm reaching

back a little bit further). I'm sure there are other candidates out there from series that I'm not so familiar with, so if you have someone in mind feel free to let me know in the comments.

Anime, like many other storytelling media, tends to have a “mother” problem. Meaning that so much anime focuses on the activities and adventures of children and teenagers that a parent's presence could be seen as stifling to their ability to get into “interesting” trouble. What decent, responsible parent would willingly allow their child go places and do things that have the potential to put them in mortal danger? Sure, there are examples in anime of parents who laugh in the face of such concerns and are more than willing to allow their children out into the world (basically every incarnation of Pokémon ever), or accept that their children are in a situation where they'll be growing up quickly and taking on adult responsibilities (Bodacious Space Pirates, absolutely), but those are less common. Coming from a more realistic perspective and looking more at anime series that are at least somewhat based around realistic social norms, if you want to have some fun it's just easier to leave parents out of the equation (or create some plot-related circumstance where they're conveniently unavailable). Since mothers are generally thought to be the more “present” parent in Japanese households, what with social norms and gender expectations being what they are even today, when the story requires a lack of parental oversight it's usually mom who suffers some ill fate (and maybe dad who becomes a buffoon or is otherwise ineffectual). Anime is full of dead-moms-as-motivation (though in some cases, like Erased, Satoru's murdered mother is still present in some form due to timeline realities); it's rarer for mom to be active and involved in Important Story Activities™.

That's just one reason why The Eccentric Family is so distinctive. Its title immediately betrays the fact that, despite its fantastical, magical setting, the story is focused on family – specifically one particular family of tanuki in Kyoto. While the original season of the show had its debut almost five years ago (which pained me to find out – time flies in anime fandom!), its sequel season appeared last Spring, providing us with a second window into the life of the Shimogamo tanuki clan. While most of the series follows the adventures of the four Shimogamo brothers and primarily the third brother, Yasaburo, their mother, Tousen, is an active participant and the glue the holds the family together, especially after the death of the brothers' father prior to the show's start.





The tomboy becomes a bride.

her more standard housewife getup. It's a great expression of her inherent nature as a trickster, something incredibly important to most respectable tanuki individuals. It also provides a funny contrast to her major weakness; Tousen is scared of lightning and can't maintain her transformations when she's startled (a quirk of many tanuki).

I recognize and admire the way in which Tousen displays inner strength, although it takes familiarity with the backstory of the series and some of the relationships to be able to fully appreciate that aspect of her character. Having lost her husband to death-by-hot-pot (which, true to the tone of the show, is both ridiculous and tragic), Tousen does the heavy emotional labor of ensuring the stability of her immediate family, and helping her sons, directly or indirectly, manage the aftermath of the event. She's obviously still heavily involved in the upbringing of her youngest son, Yashiro, but as the mother of four she still has a hand in all of her sons' lives even though three of the four have physically left the nest (or the den, I suppose).



Tousen trades scents with her mother.

With all of the supernatural and magical occurrences throughout the series, it can be easy to miss the very down-to-earth family concerns that form the backbone of the character interactions, but each Shimogamo son has his own issues that Tousen has her hand in mediating. Yashiro, the youngest, is sensitive and deals with being bullied by his cousins. Yaichiro, the oldest and most serious, is gunning for the seat of Trick Magister (elected leader of the tanuki clans). Yajiro, the second son, deals with guilt, depression, and PTSD stemming from the night of his father's

death, and thus is stuck in the form of a frog. And Yasaburo is the put-upon third son, stuck in the middle trying to keep various powerful factions balanced and himself from becoming a hot-pot dinner, all while goofing-off to the max. On the surface, all of these are obstacles for the affected characters to overcome on their own, but as with many women in her same position, Tousen has taken it upon herself (voluntarily or not) to help her family address these challenges by offering advice, guidance, and unconditional love. Their challenges are, in turn, her challenges. The cherry on top is that she somehow also manages to maintain some sort of relationship with the Ebisugawa clan (Soun Ebisugawa was responsible for her husband's death, after all, so it would be less surprising if she wanted nothing to do with them) through Kaisei, Yasaburo's on-again-off-again possible marriage partner.

I have some ambivalent feelings over the fact that so much of Tousen's character comes out through reading-between-the-lines, her interactions with other people, and her background pres-

ence in the stories of her offspring, though in a way that particular issue feels almost appropriate (possibly more appropriate than was intentional by the creators). Tousein is in the position of that I think so many parents, especially mothers, are forced to occupy. Despite having her own sense of self and inner life, her persona is inextricably connected with the children she's raised and is sometimes overshadowed in favor of celebrating their more obvious adventures and accomplishments. Motherhood is so often exalted, but less examined in a realistic way or allowed to hold the primary focus in a narrative.

Aside from one example I happened to find while poking around the internet, most discussion of the anime is focused around characters like Benten, the Friday Fellows, Nidaime, Yasaburo, and other characters who viewers would typically consider more "interesting" – people getting into trouble (or causing it), and those who wield literal and figurative power. There's less glory for or even discussion about characters who only fit into support roles or feel like someone one might actually meet in reality, though the "Touseins" of the world are the unsung diplomatic heroes who ensure that conflicts get resolved, that people know that they're cared-for, and who show support to their loved ones – all essential acts of kindness that probably ought to be glorified more than they are.



Tousein and her mother share a moment in the sun.

I'd like to close this off by describing one of my favorite scenes from the anime. In the third episode of season two, Tousein and Yasaburo visit Tousein's mother, a grand matriarch of their tanuki family, in order to seek help for Yajiro, who is still unable to transform out of his amphibious form. Grandma has knowledge of a medicine that might help him learn to control his abilities again.

Though they easily obtain the object they're there to get, what follows is delightful banter between an old mother and

a younger one. Grandma is so aged that it takes her some effort to remember who is who, including her own daughter, but the love between the two is so clear even if the details are hazy. I love the juxtaposition of the many tanuki sitting around the forest clearing, chanting sutras as if worshiping the elderly woman on her pedestal, with the two family members joking with each other playfully. With Tousein enveloped in the sunlight with her mother, there's a sense that she's carrying on a very grand tradition of mothers in the tanuki culture.

Thank you for reading, and I hope I've whet your appetite for *The Eccentric Family*! Go check it out on Crunchyroll if you have the time (and don't miss the second season if you enjoyed the first!).

Who were your favorite anime moms from recent (or maybe not-so-recent) anime history? Please let me know in the comments. Or just show some love for Tousein Shimogamo if you have some to share!

## Books

Hardwired by Walter Jon Williams

Review by Heath Row

The StF Amateur

At first, I thought that this relatively early cyberpunk novel was a fast follow-up intended to capitalize on the subgenre's growing popularity. I'd never heard of Williams before. There are so many awesome cyberpunk elements present that while reading the opening pages, it almost felt like too much, all at once. Like a pastiche or near-parody. But that feeling quickly faded as I got pulled into the story.

In part, that's because Williams is a very good writer. A Very Good Writer. When *Hardwired* was published, he'd already been writing science fiction since the early 1980s, later earned multiple Hugo and Nebula award nominations for his novels and short fiction, and even received a Philip K. Dick Award nomination. Despite his many award noms, he might have won only two Nebula awards for short fiction the 2000 story "Daddy's World" (from the Constance Ash-edited anthology *Not of Woman Born*) and 2004's "The Green Leopard Plague." (*Asimov's Science Fiction*, October-November 2003)

The book is also excellent, despite my initial misgivings. The first in a multi-work series—including the novel *Voice of the Whirlwind* and two novelettes—*Hardwired* also inspired a 1989 sourcebook for the Cyberpunk roleplaying game. The world portrayed by Williams is that rich and deep.

The novel features cybernetically augmented couriers who drive high-octane vehicles on elicited cross-country delivery runs. There are enhanced bodyguards and assassins equipped with internal prosthetic weapons. A computer programmer finds himself lost among the network's code after death, able to communicate with friends and compatriots over phone lines. An isolated corporate leader loses his sense of morality and decency as he strives to create his twisted vision of the future. And Orbital platforms and other celestial bodies have been colonized, some by corporate entities that have attacked the Earth by redirecting meteorites.

The characters are very well portrayed, their interpersonal relationships and shifting loyalties intriguing, the technology fascinating, corporate shenanigans malevolent, and heroic attempts to organize the couriers in opposition to the forces they eventually realize they're serving are laudable. Even the portrayal of the protagonists—who lead hardscrabble and hard-won existences—as they determine who they can trust, open up to, and even love proved interesting. The tensions and stakes in the book are very real.

Regardless, there is a lot going on in the book. Some of it is detail, and some is in the foreground. The result is an intricately dense narrative that is surprisingly solid for an author I should have already had on my radar. As recently as 2022, Williams seems to have turned his attention to military sf and space opera—the *Dread Empire's Fall* series—so he's keeping his hand in. I'm sure that any book by Williams is worth picking up.



## Comics

### ELITE Asks "Is Superman Relevant?"

#### Superman vs. The Elite Analysis by Jason P. Hunt

Does the world need a Superman?



That's the question raised in *Superman vs. the Elite*, the latest DC Animated feature from the pen of Joe Kelly, based on his one-shot issue in *Action Comics #775*: "What's So Funny about Truth, Justice and the American Way?" (2001).

This time out, Superman meets a new brand of superhero – metahumans with powers that rival his own in terms of strength and ability, but without the moral boundaries that restrain Superman's actions.

The Elite decide that Superman has too much "goody goody" in him to be effective, especially after an incident with terrorists in the UK and another spat with the Atomic Skull that results in numerous deaths and lots of fiery destruction. To Manchester Black and his team, Superman has just fallen behind the times.

In the post-9/11 world, it's easy to question the relevance of superheroes, especially Superman, with his "American Way" and Midwest family values. He's not called "The Big Blue Boy Scout" for nothing. And that creates a quandary in that Superman now has to practice self-restraint even in the face of adversaries who don't think twice about killing the enemy, and scoff at collateral damage.

And to add insult to injury, the Elite fandom grows as the story progresses. People seem to be losing patience with bad guy after bad guy coming in over and over again. When the Elite take the law into their own hands, they're met with cheers and applause. "It's about time," is the reaction. But is this indicative of a growing lack of appreciation for what Superman means to everyone? Or is this reaction to the Elite born of frustration at the system and how it's fundamentally flawed by corrupt officials and politicians acting in their own best interests?

It's an interesting question raised in the story, one that even Lois Lane cannot answer easily. At what point does Superman's restraint become pointless? How long can he stand up for law and order when it means the bad guys have an opportunity to come back and do more damage over and over again? When does Superman choose to say "enough is enough" and wipe them all out?

Because he very much can. Superman is easily one of the most powerful heroes on the planet, and could eliminate each and every villain he comes across. And nobody could stop him, really. Not Lex Luthor. Not Maggie Sawyer. Not even Batman could put him down permanently without cheating.



George Newbern returns as the voice of Superman, with Pauly Perrette taking a turn as Lois. And while I think the animation seems a little blocky this time around, it doesn't distract from the overall story, which moves at a brisk pace and builds to a roundhouse kick of a final confrontation between Superman and Manchester Black. It will definitely give you a moment to pause and wonder just what would happen if the Big Blue Boy Scout ever really lost his temper.

And it also gives us reason to pause and ask the questions of ourselves as fans, as kids who grew up with comic books and “Super Friends” and the Superman lunch boxes:

Does the world need an “aw, shucks” Kansas farm boy who still believes in “ladies first” and “yes, sir” and “no, sir” politeness?

Does the world need a hero who will fight for truth, justice and the American Way?

Yes. Yes, it does.

## Movies

### Dr. Giggles

Review by Heath Row

The StF Amateur



This 1992 slightly comedic horror movie has all the makings of a successful franchise series but only resulted in one flick, which is surprisingly good. Largo Entertainment had secured an exclusive first-look deal to develop and produce movies based on Dark Horse Comics properties, and this was the first outcome of that agreement. Interestingly, a Dr. Giggles comic book wasn't published until after the movie was written and filmed, available in comic shops to line up with the film's release. That miniseries lasted just two issues.

The titular Dr. Giggles is the long-missing son of a town doctor who was stoned to death by the local citizenry and his patients after a number of his patients died, their hearts removed. His wife—his son's mother—had died of a heart condition, and the physician lost his mind. No one knew how his son, who'd assisted him during the fatal medical procedures, had escaped the mob justice. The scene in which viewers learn how that was done is one of the most surprising moments I've ever seen on film. The movie is worth watching for that scene alone. Otherwise, the movie echoes many similar movies.

Dr. Giggles comes across as a bit of a more-vocal Michael Myers character. His basement operating room—in the leaking foundation of his father's former home and workplace—reminded me of Freddy Krueger's boiler room. And the movie's final girl, then-19-year-old Holly Marie Combs (who went on to act in and produce *Charmed*) resonates with the roles of oh, so many.

The opening scenes, in which Dr. Giggles escapes from the insane asylum in which he'd been anonymously housed and treated for decades, brought to mind Arkham Asylum from the Batman comics and movies. And the overall plotline—in which Dr. Giggles seeks revenge on the town that led to his father's downfall—is pretty standard stuff: One-by-one hunting and dispatch of characters unfortunate enough to come close to the antagonist.

Other aspects of the movie include a caring father and uncaring stepmother, a traumatized but sober police officer, a curious Black policeman, a young woman—the final girl—with a heart condition of her own, a wayward boyfriend, the town's teenage temptresses, an elevated location where locals park cars to make out and drink, and a carnival near the local school.

Additional scenes proved notable, including Dr. Giggles' waiting room—in a way reminiscent of Beetlejuice—and self-surgery in which Dr. Giggles removes a bullet lodged in his side. The movie features multiple catch phrases, neither of which really work. But despite the production's paint-by-number quality, it's neither too self-aware nor too silly to work well. Dr. Giggles was a pleasant surprise that probably should have yielded at least one sequel. I'm slightly mystified that it didn't.

## SerCon

### Alonzo Deen Cole Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph. D.

N3F Historian

Alonzo Deen Cole (1897 -- 1971) was an important figure in the golden age of radio drama. He was born in Saint Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota.

He created the popular radio horror classic, "The Witch's Tale." Later, he became the only writer for the famous radio series "Casey, Crime Photographer," producing 384 scripts. Many of these scripts had fantasy/horror plots.



In addition, he wrote scripts for other popular radio programs, including "The Shadow," creating nearly 1,000 radio plays during his career.

Cole began acting in school plays as a young man in St. Paul, Minnesota, and toured in stock companies. While in New York, he convinced radio station WOR to air his series devoted to the supernatural.

### The Witch's Tale

"The Witch's Tale," a 30 minute, horror-fantasy radio series, was first broadcast on WOR on May 28, 1931, on the



Mutual Broadcasting System and ran for seven years, until June 13, 1938. It was later heard in syndication in both 15-minute and 30-minute formats.

Cole wrote, produced, directed, and even hosted this brain-child of his, along with his wife, Marie O'Flynn, who played several female roles.

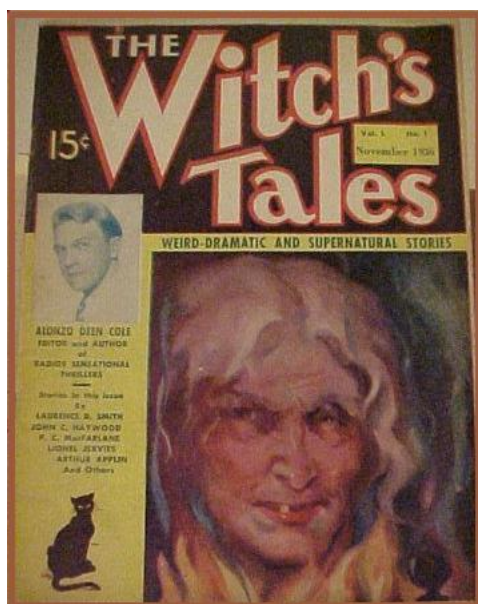
A cackling, 122-year-old witch named Old Nancy, introduced the half hour program with her meowing black cat, Satan. Old Nancy helped create the atmosphere for the show, inviting listeners to listen to her terrifying tales.

Adelaide Fitz-Allen, Miriam Wolfe (of "Let's Pretend" fame), and Martha Wentworth all played Old Nancy. The program's theme music was "Orgy of Spirits" by Alexander Ilyinski.

Early Opening: "The Witch's Tale. The fascination for the eerie, weird, blood-chilling tales told by Old Nancy, the witch of Salem, and Satan, the wise black cat. They're waiting, waiting for you now."

Early Closing: "The Witch's Tale with Old Nancy and her black cat, Satan, will be with you again next Thursday."

### Literary Adaptations



In addition to the original scripts by Cole for the program, there were several genre literary adaptations, including the following:

1931: "The Bronze Venus," adapted from La Venus d'Ille by Prosper Merimee.

1932: "In the Devil's Name," adapted from the confessions of the supposed real-life witch Isobel Gowdie. Unfortunately, only the first half of this episode has survived.

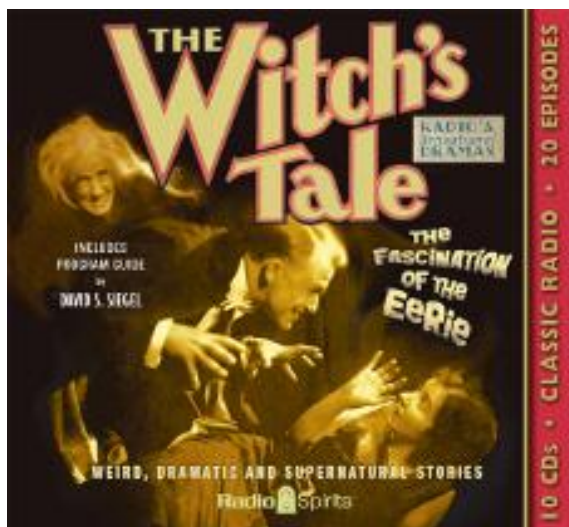
1934: "The Wonderful Bottle," adapted from "The Bottle Imp" by Robert Louis Stevenson.

1934: "The Flying Dutchman," based on the legend of the famous ghost ship.

1935: An adaptation of Frankenstein by Mary Shelley.



## Magazine Version



The Witch's Tales was the title of a magazine, published for two issues in 1936. Cole's photograph appeared on the cover of both issues, and he probably wrote the lead story in the first issue ("The Madman").

Purportedly the editor, Cole actually did little work for the magazine.

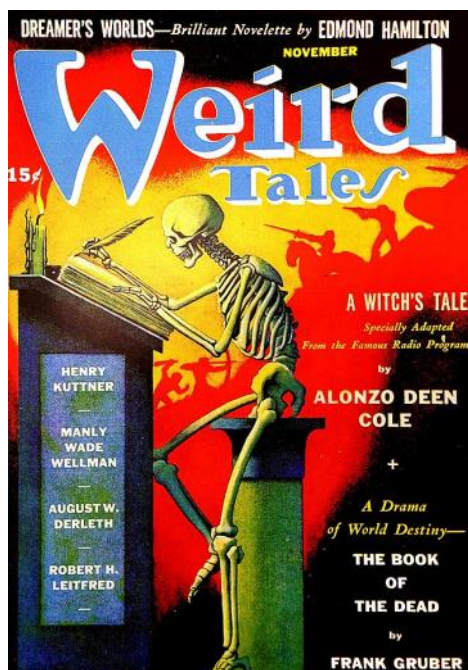
When available, these rare magazines sell for thousands of dollars each.

## Cole Stories in Weird Tales

Cole had stories published in the genre magazine *Weird Tales*, including "The Spirits of the Lake" (November, 1941, issue), and "The Gipsy's Hand" (May, 1942).

"The Spirits of the Lake," appeared in the issue with the famous skeleton cover by genre artist Hannes Bok. Bok also provided much of the interior artwork for this 1941 issue.

## Some Concluding Comments



An effort was made to bring the radio series to television in 1958, but this effort was not successful.

EC Comics' publisher Bill Gaines was inspired by Cole's Old Nancy host to create the character the Old Witch as the host of EC's *The Haunt of Fear*.

The *Witch's Tale*, published posthumously in 1998, contained 13 scripts, an episode log of the program, and a biographical sketch of Cole.

Cole was born February 22, 1897, and died, age 74, on March 31, 1971, age 74, in Glendale, Los Angeles County, California.

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Note: Wikipedia, ISFDB, and Fancyclopedia 3 were also consulted.

## 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 indestructible 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.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Pink Stars

## Food of Famous Authoress

### Carrot Cake from Cedar Sanderson

This recipe is a variant, loosely, on the Splendid Spice Cake recipe. With... changes.

For one thing, I reduced the overall sugar just a touch. And I took the liquid back a bit, to allow for the addition of carrots. I customized the spice blend to favor carrot's innate flavors, which included the addition of just a pinch of cayenne. I also swapped out vanilla for orange blossom water, something you don't have to do if you don't keep that in your pantry. If you do, it's a very subtle but wonderful addition I highly recommend.

These work nicely as unfrosted muffins, or with cream cheese frosting. I really love the skull cake pan, but be sure to grease and flour it well!

1/2 c room temperature butter  
 1/4 c lard  
 2 c dark brown sugar  
 1 1/2 tsp ground ginger  
 1 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon  
 1/4 tsp ground mace  
 1/4 tsp ground nutmeg  
 1/4 tsp cardamom  
 1/4 tsp cloves  
 1 tsp orange blossom water  
 1/8 tsp cayenne  
 3 eggs  
 1/2 tsp baking soda  
 1 c grated (packed) carrot  
 3 c all-purpose flour  
 1 c milk  
 1 tsp lemon juice  
 2 tsp baking powder

Preheat the oven to 350F and grease your pans, or line 18 muffin cups with paper liners.

Cream together the butter, lard, and brown sugar. Cream in the spices and orange blossom water.

Beat in the eggs and baking soda, beat until light and fluffy. Stir the carrots into this.

Alternating, add in one cup of flour, a third of the milk, then flour, until all is combined. Add in the lemon juice, then the baking powder. Once the batter is completely mixed, put into the pans or liners, filling for cupcakes to about 2/3 of the pan/liner.

Bake at 350F for 25-30 min, until a tester comes out cleanly. Move to a rack. Cool completely if you will be frosting these.

Even with the non-stick coating, the skulls look best when greased - I like to use the spray stuff - and lightly floured.

The recipe makes about 24 cupcakes, or 12 cupcakes and 6 skulls, since the skulls are larger than the cupcakes are. If you don't frost them, you can treat them like muffins and they go really well with coffee. Like King Harv's Blanket Fort blend (shameless plug here! I don't get anything from King Harv, but I am part of the Live! from the Blanket Fort team and we're all pretty thrilled about this coffee.) which is a medium roast with personality and great flavor. Just like the podcast...

For either cupcakes or the skulls, don't overfill. This cake has enough leavening to keep it a light, rich, moist cake. Which is lovely to eat, and does expand!

Leave some room for the batter to rise.

And of course, I have to pay the cat tax now that I have a kitten!







Floating Isle by Tiffanie Gray