

“Strawberry Spring”: Stephen King’s Chilling Entry into the Podcast World

By: Todd Vaughan



For [nearly 50 years](#), Stephen King has thrilled readers with his terrifying novels and short stories. Many of his tales turned into popular films like “Cujo,” “Pet Sematary,” and the creepy classic “Misery.” In the fall of 2021, the master of horror moved beyond the movie industry and stepped into the podcast world. He made his debut with the Audio Up and iHeartRadio production “Strawberry Spring”. Written and directed by “The Voice” producer [Lee Metzger](#), “Strawberry Spring” is an edge-of-your-seat murder mystery that keeps listeners wondering from start to finish.

“Strawberry Spring” is [based on the tale of the same name](#) from King’s 1978 short stories collection, “Night Shift.” The story revolves around a serial killer named Springheel Jack who murdered a slew of college girls in 1968 before disappearing and never killing again. The tale begins in 1976, when a girl is murdered on the campus of New Sharon college. The grizzly murder looks eerily similar to the killings

Springheel Jack performed on that same campus eight years earlier. This leads authorities to believe that Springheel Jack may be back in action.

Henry Denton, a teacher and former journalist who closely followed and wrote about Springhill Jack's 1968 murders, is called upon to help with the investigation of the newest killing. Told from Henry's point of view, listeners are transported back to '68 when it all began and follow Henry through all eight episodes as he works nonstop to uncover the identity of Springheel Jack.

Unlike many podcasts that are practically pre-recorded talk radio shows, "Strawberry Spring" is a scripted podcast performed by Hollywood actors. Aside from its inclusion of "I know, right"—a phrase actually coined in the 90s—the script is well-written. "Tron: Legacy" and "Mudbound" star Garrett Hedlund leads the cast as Henry Denton and shines at portraying a determined journalist struggling to balance his work life with his personal life.

Hedlund is joined by other notable cast members, including *Euphoria* star Sydney Sweeney, who plays Ann, Henry's brash and no-nonsense boss, and Herizen F. Guardiola, who plays Henry's fiancé and wife, Rachel. The cast also includes Milo Ventimiglia, best known for playing America's favorite current television dad, Jack Pearson, on *This Is Us*. Ventimiglia plays the role of Kevin Hartigan, a radio DJ and charming frenemy of Henry.

Production company Audio Up says it aims to deliver "[audio blockbusters](#)," and that is clearly Audio Up's goal with "Strawberry Spring". With its thrilling sound effects, haunting score, and Hollywood stars, "Strawberry Spring" is like an FX tv show without the visuals. Though not as scary as some of King's work, listeners may still find themselves jumping at the unexpected sound of glass shattering or a knife slicing through skin.

In fact, it's such sound effects that truly elevate this podcast to the next level. When Henry details Springheel Jack's latest victim in the "Drive Slow, Walk Fast" episode, you can't help but feel creeped out by the eerie wind sounds and Alfred Hitchcock-like strings that play underneath Henry's words.

But the sounds aren't only used to create scares. For instance, when Henry first visits the office of The New Sharon Times during his early investigation into Springheel Jack, the ringing phones, slamming doors, and endless chatter of people

in the background make it feel like you're right there with Henry inside this bustling newsroom. It's these details that truly make "Strawberry Spring" a joy to listen to.

The podcast isn't without a few flaws though. For starters, the story often jumps back and forth between 1968, when Springheel Jack both came onto the scene and disappeared, and 1976 when he allegedly reemerges. The same loud swishing sound occurs nearly every time a scene changes, regardless of the era. Without visuals, it's not always clear whether the scene you're listening to is happening in 1968 or 1976.

Additionally, Ann and Rachel have similar-sounding voices, with Rachel sounding like a softer, more laidback version of Ann. Initially, I thought the roles were being played by the same actress, and it made the first episode confusing to follow. After looking up the cast and seeing that it wasn't the same actress, I finally was able to distinguish their voices by the second episode.

Aside from those few hiccups, "Strawberry Spring" is a stellar production that's suspenseful and fun to listen to. It's a great introduction to the podcast world for audiobook lovers and Stephen King fans who haven't tapped into podcasts yet. With an estimated [104 million monthly listeners](#) in 2020, podcasts are becoming many people's new favorite form of entertainment. So, we'll likely see more written works from King and other popular authors adapted into podcasts. In the meantime, treat yourself to a spine-tingling podcast thrill ride with Stephen King's "Strawberry Spring".