



Claims Department

Another week, another issue!

I'm loving doing Claims Department as basically the new version of those early *Drink Tanks*.

This issue was written across seven busy days. Cinequest (I saw one program in theatre, and hung at the lounge!) and the storm (Mom made it through with no damage) and Trump indictment, and wrestling deaths, and family stuff and more! Still got it done, though!!!

This weekend is gonna be busy, especially with me needing to get a bunch of zine stuff done, but mostly, I'm going to be watching wrestling and remembering...





I had no idea this happened, and I'm weirded out.

Capitola is, I believe, a city next to Santa Cruz. It's also where I go for the Farmer's Market every Sunday. It's best known for the colorful portion of town next to the beach.

They also had an incredible set of UFO photos taken back in 2008 and I had no freakin' clue until this morning's scrolling with coffee.

SO, back in 2008, the first wave of unknown drone sightings were happening over US skies. We knew a lot about drones because they were being used in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that trickled down. There were reports of drones all

over the place, with Florida being the most heavily targeted area. Texas, too.

So, here's what the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) had to say about the report and photos by Rajinder Satyanarayana -

On May 20th, 2007, a person going by the name of Rajinder Satyanarayana posted six photographs (through Craigslist.com with a link to the photos on Flickr.com) of a strange airborne object, allegedly taken on May 16, 2007, in Capitola, California. His initial account of the sighting was:

"This week I was visiting my fiancé's parents in Capitola (we were actually there to tell them about our engagement, in fact). We were eating dinner on the back porch when we noticed this "object" sort of hovering in the sky. The camera was still out from earlier so I grabbed it and tried to get some clear shots of it. It took off over the roof shortly after, so I ran into the street in front of the house to follow, trying to get more shots without wobbling around too much (which was harder than it sounds). It then came in lower over a telephone pole, where I was able to get a few more pictures, before it finally took off into the distance pretty fast. I thought it was gone but noticed it was still visible, so I grabbed a few more pictures. At one point a car stopped to look as well. No one had any idea what this thing was but everyone in the car was visibly freaked out by it. Once it was gone they told me to call the news and drove off. I'm not sure who else saw it in the neighborhood since I don't live down there, but I'm sure at least a few others must have noticed it. It was way too weird and way too close to go



unnoticed. Once it was gone and I caught my breath I could barely stop my hands from shaking for the next hour or so. Needless to say, this is all we talked about for the rest of the night. None of us can figure out what it was (and that's saying something, because my fiancé's dad is a mechanical engineer). We sent a copy of the photos to their newspaper but haven't heard back yet. I dunno how long that kind of thing takes. There's also some writing on this thing, which I didn't recognize (and I read both English and Hindi). You can see it in a few of the pictures.

Now, MUFON is as legit a UFO investigation organization as you can find, and they took it seriously. The photos? Well, as you could see, they're kinda out there. They look unlike anything I've ever seen reported as a UFO. They tend to be if not completely symmetrical, at least appear to be somewhat in that realm. This? It looks like a very specific kitchen

gadget. It's a weird shape, and the other photos appear to show little variation.



I am nearly 100% certain I know where these were shot. There were other photos, shot about 30 minutes away in a state park called Big Basin.



I can tell you EXACTLY to the foot where this was taken, in an area where there's a pullout on the road looking out across towards Little Basin. That area burned in the 2020 fires, sadly, but I am 100% sure I know the spot as I visited it many times. I can tell you from my experience, the thing can't be more than 100 or so feet away in the Capitola photos, and the Big Basin photos are likely a bit further. The scale of these two, then, is certainly not uniform. You can tell by the basic shape that these are different.

At about the same time, other 'drones' were shot in Bakersfield. The explanation? Something called CARET, which I believe is a drone program from the 1980s.

Now, this is supercool, and it's literally MINUTES away from my house!!!! Wish I'd been living there back then!







The Hawaiian Fires have been continuously on my mind, and even after an Arborist examined the Banyan Tree (diagnosis—living tissue in the roots and trunks, crispy foliage notwithstanding, it's likely to go on just fine) I'm still hoping that the best possible outcome for everyone happens.

But, sadly, the death toll keeps rising.

Yes, this is climate change, just like our fires in Boulder Creek, just like Paradise. These will continue, and eventually places that haven't burned in a few generations are going to burn, and that alone should spur us on. I don't know if we can reverse it, but slowing it sure seems likely, though painful





*Asteroid City* was exactly the movie I wanted it to be.

Bella and I sat down to watch it together. I would not have expected an 8-year-old to be interested, but here we are. Within two minutes, Bella was cackling, and I was just charmed.

There's not a lot of plot, though there's a lot of character-building and performance. The whole thing is a play-within-a-play and there's backstory and two separate stages, as it were. The saturated colored world of Wes Anderson and the black-and-white world of the behind-the-scenes of the play that is being performed in color.

Oh yeah, it's about to get meta.

The 'play' story centers around Asteroid City, a desert town where an asteroid crashed centuries before. Augie and his family are coming for an astronomy convention, and also Augie has been holding back the fact that the mother of his four kids has died.

It's that kind of film.

The backstage portion includes the actors discussing the play with each other and the director, and that portion is hosted by Bryan Cranston. It's less a look at the process, but an investigation of how both the fiction performed and the performers interact. We see discussions of what the play is, or should be, and then how those ideas are reflected in the play, but at the same time, why the actors came to ask those questions. There's a lovely scene where Margot Robie, playing Augie's dead wife, recites a scene that was cut from the performance to the actor playing Augie (Jason Schwartzman). That scene, played out over an alley with fire escape landings on either side, is touching, but more importantly, it's clearly Anderson playing with the ideas we all have of doomed lovers from a pair who aren't lovers, and only one of them is doomed, and only in the play that she has been almost completely cut out of.

There's a UFO angle also.

And atomic testing.

And Eisenhower.

That's the thing that this story does so well; it's an excuse for Anderson, one of the world's best imagists, to play with retro-futurism in a way that is post-modern, but without specifically doing a scifi film.

Because despite UFOs and Aliens and Atomics, it's not a sci-fi film: the play within the film is a sci-fi play, but it's false. We're watching a non-SF film about these characters as they go about doing their job, and that means that changes everything.

The cast is incredible. Schwartzman can carry a film, and Tom Hanks has the best performance I've seen of his in more than two decades. Steve Carrell is ultra-quirky, but not like he was in *Anchorman*. Scarlett Johansson has this odd role where she's playing what I imagine Nicole Kidman would be: a world-weary superstar actress. She does it well, and the character feels like it's a comment on the world we're in but it's also muted in a story where everything blares.







Life around here is pretty normal.

After a terrible two weeks with no money, things are better now that both Vanessa and I have gotten paid. The kids are back in school, and they have an after-school enrichment program they seem to enjoy, though they had JP in a ukelele class, and for a kid who has general trouble sitting upright for long periods of time, not the best idea.

Health-wise, after last year's hospitalization, things have been better. My A1c has evened out my blood pressure seems to be well-controlled. I'm not losing anymore weight, but to me that's not something I'm shooting for. Keeping the numbers where they're at is far more important!







I am worried for LA.

They're getting a Hurricane, something that hasn't happened since 1939. That's a long time to ignore the possibility of one enough to allow pretty much every infrastructure and public service system to think it's impossible.

It'll likely hit LA today as a Category 2.

My Mom lives in the city of Beaumont, about 90 minutes from LA by Palm Springs, in the desert. I've seen projections of up to 5 inches in 48 hours.

That's twice what they got last year. In total.

Palm Springs is actually at the foot of the mountains, and they're likely to get at least a few slides from that much soaking. Palm Springs is arid, and two inches in a year can be notable. The entire city is not made for rain, and flash flooding is pretty likely.

And that scares me, because as much as I love LA, I love Palm Springs even more!

I'm hoping it works out, but it's clear that no one there has any idea how to deal with this sort of weather event. Earthquakes? Sure, those are easy; you wait, then it happens, and you react. Storms, when you know it's coming and know that your systems can't deal with them, you're kinda screwed







I make lamejun.

It's my all-time favorite food, an Armenian, and Turkish, and various other cultures, flatbread with a minced meat topping. It's delightful, and I used to get them from a bakery in Cambridge back in the day when I was dating an Armenian woman.

That was more than twenty years ago.

There was an Armenian restaurant in Sunnyvale, but they're gone. Catherine Crockett got me a lamejun when I was GOH at SFConTario. Vanessa even made a batch once and they were really good.

Now, it's my turn.

I started with reading up and finding that there were a bunch of recipes that used flour tortillas. That's OK, I guess, but I thought that Almond Flour Tortillas would work even better. They're a little stiffer, and it approximates the texture and flavor of the actual flatbread.

And if you manage the seasoning of the meat, you can barely tell the difference.

You start by mincing mushrooms. Crimini or white button are fine for this one. I tend to add a bit of salt while I'm mincing them. Then toss them in a bowl. Mincing some garlic, I tend to buy the Christopher Farms pre-minced, and then dice some red or yellow peppers and then I'd add some grated onion. Toss them all in a bowl, and add some sumac, dried Ajika (it's a Georgian spice blend, though I'm sure you could use a combo of red pepper and garlic powder, black pepper, red pepper flake, dried parsley, and sometimes the Bavarian seasoning blend from Penzey's).

Then, the meat.

I like very lean meats, ground beef or chicken or lamb. I haven't tried pork, but I imagine it would work fairly well. Then I put on vinyl gloves and get to mixing. Over-mixing actually. You want everything combined and the meat to come out like a slightly chunked version of pate. I tend to add a little Olive Oil while I'm squishing it. It takes five to ten minutes to get it there.

Then, you take a tortilla, grab a ball of the meat-mix and press it to spread all the way across the tortilla. Put it in the air fryer for 15 minutes on 350. In ours, I start it on the middle rack for 10 minutes or so and then move to the top

rack for the last 5 minutes . It'll shrink up a lil' bit so you wanna make sure you put a bit more than you'd expect on it.

After it's done, the traditional Armenia way is to glop a little yogurt on it, or wrap it around a pickle. Me? I like it with a squeeze of lemon.

It's good eatin' and fairly easy. I usually make way more mixture than I think I'll need and then make burgers out of the left-overs. They're really tasty!

I do wish there was an Armenian place around here, y'all know how much I love Zankou Chicken, but if there's not gonna be one, this is the next best thing.







No band ever opened with three better albums than Squeeze.

From the very first song on the album *Squeeze*, you knew this was something special. The opening song, *Sex Master*, is a great guitar-driven punk rock meets Sha-na-na sort of tune. Lots of hammering piano, and fuzz-y guitar going on. It's amazing.

*Bang-Bang* sorta follows the same mold, with a lower-fi feel, which I approve of. *Strong in Reason* is a flatout post-punk mid-tempo tune that comes straight ahead and it's stripped-down in a way that none of the rest of the album is, until the moment it doesn't need to be. It's got a very *Talking*



*Heads* vibe going on.

Of course, it's *Take Me I'm Yours* that really seems like it announced the band to the world. It's rather simple, in fact I'd argue it's flat, but in a way that draws you in as a listener. I love it, and the production, done by the legendary John Cale of The Velvet Underground, is a big part of the success.

The second album? Amazing.

There's a lot more synth on it, and it gives a bigger 1980s vibe, but it's from 1979. Songs like *Slap & Tickle* and *It's Not Cricket* use synths incredibly successfully, and I can only think they were listening to a lot of Kraftwerk, because that's what they feel like...only with lyrics of the moment, something that Kraftwerk never really did. There are more plain ol' rock 'n roll songs, with *It's So Dirty* leading the charge. The best lyrics seem to be from *Up the Junction*, which kinda feels like lyrical gymnastics, and it works. *Good-bye Girl* is my favorite, and it's very much Kraftwerk instrumental while playing with incredibly strong lyrics.

And *Cool for Cats*, the closer, is just an amazing groove. It's really impressive.

*Argybargy* is a strong album, and it contains Squeeze's absolute signature song—*Pulling Mussels from a Shell* Along with *Black Coffee in Bed*, it defines Squeeze perfectly. It's a band that is playing with heart, and understanding how to push a groove through a layer of heavy lyricism.

*Another Nail in My Heart* is another great song, but it's coming right after *Pulling Mussels*, which has to be like following Kenny Omega on a wrestling card.

Squeeze has broken up a few times, and reunited a few times, but really, these three albums were game-

changers, and though they did have some absolute bangers on their other albums, notably *Black Coffee in Bed* and *Cigarette of a Single Man* which seems to be striking out from a location where a lot of The Smiths' song came out of. There's quality stuff, and I can never put my finger on why these three albums work together so damn well.

I think it's just youth.

Some bands are only hungry when they're young and still trying to make it, because making it means no longer having to try. Sometimes it's personnel, but usually it's something more primal about the participants.







I like to think that I'm in the theatre history business.

Saroyan is, at heart, a playwright. He was also literally a playwright, but even his short stories and novels feel as if they are performances. In fact, there's a lot of Wes Anderson's idea of film as stage that obviously came from the same well that Saroyan wrote from.

And there's depth to that well.

As I've been writing about Saroyan, I've been digging into the history of American theatrical clowning. Now, Saroyan had maybe two stories that mentioned clowns, but his work in theatre was always trying to stretch to incorporate

new theatrical ideals. In fact, he was usually trying to bring theatre back to what it had been before specialization of theatrical forms became the norm. He wrote *The Great American Goof*, which is a ballet-play that was one of the first pieces put on by American Ballet Theatre in its debut year. He wrote a number of pieces that took a stage form of a radio play, including the kinda-on-the-nose *Radio Play*. He wrote an opera that was really a play, and he wrote a number of pieces that were trying to be vaudeville.

Now, he wrote a piece called *Subway Circus*. The piece is a subway train going from stop to stop and the theme of the piece changes, much like a circus whose acts move from one ring to another.

The circus is a great American institution that we stole from Europe and Asian cultures, of course. The three-ring circus that I grew up on is no more, and I'm sad about that. It was from them that I gained my love of clowns, elephants, and the world's greatest animal trainer—Gunther Gable Williams!!!! I used to love going to see the show, and while the animal acts were my faves, I loved the wheel of death nearly as much.

But there were always the clowns.

The acts and routines were always fairly simple for Ringling Bros., and I've written about the Pickle Family Circus a couple of times, and especially of Bill Irwin, and how they had no animals but were built around the human performer, but especially around clowning.

I've had several friends go into clowning, including my buddy Christian who worked as the clown for Cirque (I wanna say Saltimbanco) and they are all accomplished actors and writers. They infuse their characters with something that is

inconceivable for many—immediacy. They are characters that live within a moment, and even when a bit requires a back-story (some of the maudlin bits by the likes of Red Skelton) the routine is about overcoming the tie to the past and moving into the moment.

I love clowns. I always have. I hope I get to see some more clowning soon! There's something good for the soul in it. My kids aren't scared of clowns, though they don't have much exposure to them.

One thing that theatre history has taught me is that any performance is theatre...if it's in a theatre.







SO, I've been reading indictments.

The Georgia indictment of Trump and co. has been fascinating reading. It's long, and detailed, but it goes into so many corners that I only kinda knew about. I keep up on these things, and I had little idea just how much of this played out in Pennsylvania. The backroom shenanigans were deep, and it's a shame that they aren't being tried in Penn (though there's word that cases might be brought in Arizona, and potentially Wisconsin as well)

This one will be the trickiest, and there are a few reasons why.



Arguably the biggest issue is that Trump can simply claim that he was legitimately concerned that the election had been stolen from him, and in a potential twist, that his advisors had lied to him and he believed them. That could, in theory, get him off, and that would also throw at least some folks under the bus.

The only thing that requires is for a jury to take Trump completely at his word that every little thing he said in that 'perfect phone call' had been what he believed was the honest truth.

Now, many would find that a stretch. I am one of them, but if you read the transcript of the call, it's either a brilliant actor, someone who is completely duped, or someone who truly believes what they are saying is the total truth. I could see it being taken as any of those by a jury.

While there's no question a BUNCH of people will go to jail for the electors scheme, because there is existing physical evidence, the Trump aspect is difficult. It will all depend on what jury they find, of course.

The Meadows stuff is even more interesting, and it could be the absolute bellweather of the entire case, and potentially every case against Trump. He lost his bid to not be arrested until after the hearing about moving his case to federal court, a period of 3 days. At that hearing, we may be presented with a few things, up to and including it being dismissed as being a part of his normal duties as White House Chief of Staff. It's highly unlikely, election tampering isn't a thing Federal employees can do, so there's that.

If they can convict folks for the scheme, good, but it might not be Trump, and that's a danger. Remember how he said they're opening up a can of worms? Sadly, I think he's

gonna open on if he gets re-elected, and sadly, that's always gonna be a possibility.

Most of the Red south (so most of it other than Virginia and maybe Georgia, and potentially North Carolina) aren't going to go Dem, and you can count on the less populace states staying red too. Texas could become in-play, but I don't think this is the election for that. Cubans are moving right in Florida and I'd take it from Purple to vermillion. The election will come down to five states—Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Arizona. Whoever wins three of those wins the election.

And the electorate is revved up over the indictments.

Because the Republicans have the perfect talking point at the perfect time. They think the Dems are out to get Trump the same way they're out to them. A lot, I'd say most but its probably more in the many category, are single issue voters, be it abortion of taxes or what-have-you. A lot of Republicans see the Dems are harming them with their policies, and they see Trump as standing up for them against that, and when he's attacked, he can make his whole "they're coming after you, I'm just in the way" play that much easier.

The last polls I saw from Wisc had Biden up by about 3%; 4% in Penn. I haven't seen Mich or Arizona, but Georgia will be a volatile battleground. It's highly likely the Republicans of the state will want to have their voices heard, but it could also invigorate the Dems as well, especially if they get a conviction.

Of course, there's also the wild card Supreme Court, but that's a bigger problem for a later date.



That's it for this time!

Next time, which might be sooner than normal, it's an issue looking at the great Terry Funk, one of the finest wrestlers in history. Then I'll be back with a normal, or as normal as these things get, issue.

Working on JPs and Drink Tanks and The SF Book of Lists 2, and that's gonna eat some time.

I'm loving life at the moment. Things are hard for a lot of the folks in my orbit, which sucks, but for me, it's finally at a place where things seem to be working.



