



CLAIMS

DEPARTMENT

Love this one!

Working on a few projects, but I managed to get done the biggest project my work has done this decade. A pair of books, one more than 200 pages and one about 160. The last three weeks were rough, a LOT of back-and-forth, but ultimately, I'm pleased with what we managed.

OK, this one is pretty typical.



A close-up photograph of a man with curly brown hair and light-colored eyes, looking intensely through vertical metal prison bars. He is wearing a grey t-shirt and has his hands gripping the bars on either side of his face. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

True Crime News Danny Masterson

A few years ago, the opening night film for Conquest featured Danny Masterson and Bijou Philips. The two, husband and wife for ten years at that point, were standing with the festival's head programmer, my dear friend Mike. Mike waved me over.

“Chris, I wanna introduce you, this is Bijou and Danny.”

I smiled, and put out my hand to Bijou, who kinda shook it, maybe. She then looked away as if she was trying to avoid eye-contact

with Satan himself. I then turned to Danny, offered my hand. He looked at me, chuckled and said “sure”

Never did shake my hand.

Now, I loved That 70s Show which was the most visible program where Danny was a star. He'd become one of the biggest stars on FOX in the period before they started to get big names like Kiefer Sutherland. He was young Hollywood in the late 90s and early 2000s.

He was also a HUGE Scientologist.

My thoughts on the Church of Scientology are well-known and documented. I've spoken of it often, and the day they lose tax-exempt status will be a good one. Masterson was a regular of the Celebrity Center in LA, as was Philips, and the two of them weren't on Cruise or Remini level, but they were up-there.

Masterson also raped three women.

Well, probably more, but we know of three.

And Leah Remini, the former Scientologist and actress who blew and has been raining hell down on the CoS ever since, was a big part of it.

The three women were Scientologists as well, and there have long been whispers that if you're a celebrity in CoS, you can pretty much make the calls. In the 2001 to 2003 time frame, when Masterson was a huge television star as That 70s Show was probably at its peak, he raped the three women in separate incidents. It wasn't until 2017, when one of the women, who had blown CoS herself, revealed the assault to Remini, who encouraged her to file a police report. In 2021, Masterson was arrested, and his first trial in 2022 ended in a hung jury; they couldn't agree on a sentence on one of the three charges. This led to a retrial on the other two, and Masterson was found guilty. This week, he got 30 years to life.

A lot of people are making this about Bijou.

She has a daughter with Masterson, and if it seems like Scientology left Masterson high and dry (this never would have happened in the 1990s!) their media machine has been playing up that Bijou is devastated.

It's probably not untrue, and it's likely that she's double-gaslit: once by her husband, and once by the Church.

She's stood by him, and if the reporting that some outlets have been going with is accurate, she's having mood swings and feeling alone

and unable to cope. It's been played like Danny was her world, and if you add in the way that celebs are treated within the world of CoS, she may no longer be in that sort of stratosphere any more. That's got to hurt, especially if she's a true believer.

I can't say I'm unhappy to see him go down. His lawyer says there were irregularities that they'll appeal on. He's gonna say that, kinda has to, but the reality is he's likely going to be in prison for a good long while.





UFOs over Fresno

Working in the field of Saroyanesque material, and enjoying nothing more than good Armenian cooking, I've an affinity to the city of Fresno. So many Armenians came to Watertown in Massachussetts (because it's climate was quite like several parts of Armenia) and Fresno (because it's climate was much like more different parts of Armenia) that they brought some great food and traditions with them.

Including UFOs.

What? I hear you say. Armenian UFOs?

Sure. Zorats Karer, Armenia's Stonehenge, has several carvings that look like modern depictions of Grey's, with almond-shaped eyes and

big ol' heads. There were a ton of sightings in the Soviet era, and a flap in the 1990s.

Now, Fresno UFOs have been seen over the decades. It's kinda a natural. Fresno is in the Central Valley of California and not too far off is Naval Air Station Lemoore. There are a bunch of examples of military installations being the focus of UFO flaps, things like Rendleshem Forest and even Roswell. There was a flap of sorts in 2007, with a bunch of sightings in Fresno, Clovis, and Coalinga.

The first significant sighting was in 2017, and it was a series of lights videotaped, and reported by at least a few hundred others. These looked almost exactly like a miniature version of the Phoenix Lights. These lingered for several minutes, in a rough arc, and eventually they disappeared. This was a big sighting, and one that got a lot of national coverage. The YouTube video is kinda compelling.

A few more happened between 2017 and 2022, with a large triangle sighting coming in 2019. It was 2022 that Fresno had two major sightings. The first was in April when a report of a 'black large silent seconds, the others were of a pair that stuck around a bit longer. On the 26th, another report from the near-by city of Firebaugh. July 2nd was a strange sighting in Coalinga. A smaller craft flew past a car going down I-5, crossing their both and then flying alongside the car for a while.

Then, on July 4th, an orb was sighted, and while it would usually be dismissed as some sort of firework, it persisted and moved around for 15 minutes.

Fresno is a place I'll be going more often, and maybe I'll get lucky!







On the Matter of Pizza

Every few years, I restate my pizza loves; the time is now.

I love pizza in almost every one of its forms. I've got preferences, and I've got the kind I can make, but really, they've been firm for a good lone while.

First, a general statement - Chicago > Detroit > New York.

This is less about the cities involved than about three ideas - toppings as king, bread-y, floppy.

Most modern delivery pizza is descended from New York. Even Deep Dish from most places plays closer to New York than Chicago, though certainly influenced by Detroit. I do enjoy delivery-style pizza...or at least did when I wasn't eating gluten-free to avoid getting Vanessa sick. I still might have a slice at work during lunch, but it's rare.

In order - Pizza Hut, Dominoes, Boulder Creek Pizzeria, Pizza My Heart, Round Table, Mountain Mike's, Papa John's. I love the pan pizza crust and it's absolute butteriness.

Of the main stream styles, I like deep dish by far the best, and I love my visits to Chicago. I even grab one when I'm just





passing through the airport. The cheese, toppings and sauce make it a form of casserole, but who cares? It tastes better than any other kind I've had. The two other kinds of pizza popular in Chicago, the stuffed and tavern-style, are both really good, and the tavern-style might be the best re-heating pizza there is. I know Chicagoans prefer the Tavern, but they're wrong. Actually, if I had my druthers, and the body I held back in the early 2000s, I'd be Stuffed all day, every day.

New Haven is interesting, and there are two places around here that do New Haven style. We used to fairly regularly do a grilled pizza, our barbecue being the best pizza oven we had for the hottest days of summer. I like it, and it's easily approximated using the local artisan frozen pizzas as a basis for the fun.

I cook something of a deep-dish. There's a company who does a semi-deep dish frozen pizza crust that's corn-meal-based and delicious, though a bit thicker than Chicago-style. I buy one and I start with a solid brushing of olive oil, a sprinkle of Italian seasoning and then some fresh garlic. I put that in the air-fryer for about 5 minutes, then pull it out and top it with cheese, pepperoni, sometimes steak, usually mushrooms and olives, or if I can get



Bella on-board, shrimp and mushrooms, then a little more grated cheese and some ricotta. It's amazingly good, and we don't usually use any sauce.

JP has his own type of pizza, though, and I have to admit that I love it.

The little guy can not stand cheese, which he called 'chez', and so we do an olive oil brushing, typically on an English Muffin. Oil the muffin, put it in for a few minutes. Pull it out and on top goes pepperoni, olives, mushrooms, maybe 2 at the most! Then, I mix a little tomato paste with a touch of olive oil, some Italian Seasoning, some basil, a bit of garlic, and a splash of Worcestershire sauce. Mix it up and spoon it on top. This holds things in place. Into the air fryer and it's awesome!

He also has a secret stew (stew meat, potatoes, celery, carrots, and spices) that I made a pizza out of for him once using a similar method.



One kind of pizza I've made in the past, but sadly can't until I can find a place that does good gluten-free sourdough, is the Sourdough Round Pizza. Start with a traditional San Francisco Sourdough round. They're iconic, and delicious. I've had sourdough elsewhere, notably Alaska, the UK and Toronto, and nowhere has nearly as good and smack-ya-in-the-face sourdough as good ol' San Francisco.

OK, this one takes a good while (and is related to the San Francisco Burger, which I've mentioned before, but will probably do it again in the GarciaGate Cookbook, coming Later). Start by sautéing in either butter or olive oil some finely diced onions and mushrooms, I would say Hen of the Woods or Oyster or Chanterelles if you're a big shot, add a little salt and pepper, and get 'em nice and soft, then add some garlic, basil, oregano, thyme,



and a bit of nutmeg. Lower the heat and add a splash of white wine and then some cream, and simmer for... a while. Mix some cornstarch with a little white wine or milk, and after a while, whisk that in, and get it to the point where it's thick enough to be used as a pizza sauce replacement. Let it cool while you're cutting the round in to two pieces - about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the up, and buttering the two halves. Then spread about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 80% on the sauce on the bottom part.

On the bottom, put down a layer of cheese, I recommend any shredded that has a combo of Mozz and Cheddar, but anything really, and then pile on sausage, pepperoni, olives, cooked shrimp, sliced garlic, ricotta (a few dabs), some thin-sliced basil and sliced onion if you like, and grate on some Vella dry Monterey Jack cheese.



Now, the important part - get SLICES of Mozz. BelGioioso does a great fresh Mozz in slices and it's what I used to use.

Now, the top do much more simply - spread the rest of the sauce, put a few leaves of Basil and a sprinkling of cheese. That's it.

Put the whole thing in the oven for 20 or so minutes at 350, then turn on the broil for another 3 to 5. Pull it out and let it cool, then slice the bottom part of the round about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way up, and get a skillet or the like nice and hot with butter in the bottom. The crust on a Sourdough Round is tough to get crispy, so cutting off the bottom allows for a crispy, buttery crust. Only put it in the pan for a minute or so, then remove it and set it on some paper towels for a bit.



Cut into slices, I like to do wedges, and cut the top into cheesy breadsticks. The crunchy bottom is the absolute highlight!

I'm also a fan of a good pizza burger, though I don't like the Cheeseburger Pizza. Go figure. Put a burger on a bottom bun, top with whatever pizza stuff you like, then a bunch of moss, melt under a salamander, put the top bun on. I had an amazing one of those in New Jersey on my visit there in 2011.

I had one amazing pizza decades ago that M made for me. She made a dough that was super thin, you could almost see through it. She set it aside and tossed some chicken and onions and a handful of cherry tomatoes in, cooked that for a bit, then tossed a handful of cheese on top, let it melt for a minute, then



pressed the crust on top of it, kept it like that briefly, then did a cool flipping toss of the whole thing so it landed on the crust-side down. She poured a little more oil down the side of the pan and it got super-crispy. Never tried it myself, but it looks fun!

People are always innovating as far as pizza goes. Birria pizza is the latest, and one of the most fun. It's a riff on the quesabirria tacos that came out of San Diego after flowing out of Tijuana and into the rest of California starting about 2015. It's stewed beef (traditionally goat) that's put on a cheese-laded tortilla and served with consommé. Now, that's great for a taco, but isn't a pizza just an unfolded Italian taco? Birria pizza is actually pretty close to a pulled pork pizza, and even when it's served with the consommé, it's more or less traditional.

There are places in and around LA that have been legendary for kicking off Pizza revolutions, notably the invention of the California Pizza (you can blame Wolfgang Puck's Spago and later California Pizza Kitchen) and many of the niche pizzas have an origin story that includes Los Angeles. One that I've had and loved was from a food truck and it was Vietnamese Pizza. The crust was soft, almost springy. I learned that it was a rice flour crust, which made sense. The toppings, though, were Vietnamese beef, full of five spice and star anise, and green onion, and the cheese was fairly thin, more a dusting that went over the top. The flavor was really good, though I wish it had been on slightly different crust, but I can't say the flavor didn't hit!

There are so many types. The Green Pizza, the Gyro Pizza, is a classic in a lot of places, though I tend to avoid since they always wanna put on calamata olives and feta. There's an Israeli pizza place in Brookline (or at least there was...) that did Kosher pizza. No meat at all, but the seasoning in the sauce was incredible! Chinese Pizza just doesn't work for me, though I know I've thrown Sweet 'n Sour Pork on top of a crust with some cheese late at night. I'm not made of stone!!!

The Indian Pizza is a long-standing concept that's taken off over the last decade or so, and I love it! These started in San Francisco, but it was really in Fremont that these took off, only to

spread all over the Bay Area, and now I understand across the country! I used to make these after I discovered that I actually liked Indian food. A Safeway Pizza dough, and then I'd go to one of the dirt-cheap Indian places around Santa Clara and buy either Paneer Tikka Masala or Lamb Korma. I'd put the Indian on top of the crust, top that with cheese and boom! There you have it. The current crop of Indian or Curry Pizza places tend to be more traditional pizzas, that is cheese on the bottom, toppings on top, but I'm waiting for a Chicago-style Curry Pizza place!







Sometimes, I fall down.

Sometimes, on those falls, I hit my head. Not as much lately, I've been far more likely to hit my head standing up beneath something far too close.

This time, I flopped onto the soft, wonderful coach of Forever Saroyan, where I do most of my reading and some of my writing, and the back of my head slammed into the arm.

I had my favorite podcast, Last Podcast on the Left, playing on the phone in my pocket, and the opening had just

started. My head hit and everything went dark for a second, but not so long that I missed any chunk of the opening.

It's been a while since I knocked myself out. Now, about 9 hours later, it hurts a bit, perhaps because I touched it a minute ago, but I'm not nauseous, not having coordination issues, blurred vision or anything else. That's a worry, and as a guy who has had a lot of concussions, I'm glad this one doesn't seem to be much of one.

Though, I do worry, as I'm fairly certain all the head trauma of living my life has led to my memory issues, even if the doctors keep trying to tell me it's just a vitamin deficiency even if all the tests keep coming back negative for one.







Yes, I've been reading.

OK, true, it's mostly for issues of *Journey Planet* and *The Drink Tank* (and before I ran out of Jack Haldeman stories, for this zine!) and there are short stories for *Short Story*, *Short Podcast*. I've been reading a lot of short stories again even outside of those, and I've found some fairly recent gems.

Uncanny is easily my favorite magazine at the moment (and not just because they published a piece of mine in their latest issue!)

and they're always presenting solid stories from writers I'd otherwise not find on my own. The story "Rabbit Test" is up for the Hugo, and reading it, I can totally see why. It's a masterpiece of how you take historical moments, couple them with a fairly simple story, and make it all about the politics of this moment.

And man, it nails some stuff hard.

The story details the reproductive choices that run through a family starting in the near-present and going through the future. It's heartbreaking at times, but then author Samantha Mills does something brilliant - she infuses history, or at least the impact of historic moments on individuals, which has the effect of bouncing us back and forth through time, allowing us to view the end product, the story of the lives on the main timeline, as both tragic and magical. It's a story of the human spirit over the reality of legalistic processes designed for control and degradation in defense of power.

It's very of the moment, you think?

I loved this story, it had power the entire way through, and the writing was crisp, smart, nuanced where it needed to be, something of a 2-by-4 when that was needed.

So far, it's got my vote for Best Short Story, but I haven't read D.I.Y. yet and I hear good things.

For the Jack the Ripper in Fiction issue of Journey Planet, I read the anthology Ripper by Gardner Dozois and Susan Casper. It's a great antho, and there are some stories I'll be talking about in the issue, but one I won't be, but did cover on Short Story Short Podcast, is Casper's "Spring Fingered Jack" which is a great horror short that I'd argue is only barely genre.

The story is that it's a guy who gets off work, walks through a seedy district to get to...an arcade.

That's right, in 1988, there was an illicit arcade!

The idea is that this particular arcade has a game that is not suitable for general consumption, and that game is all about the Ripper crimes. That then leads to an ending that I should have seen coming, there's not much action to the story without it, but I was blindsided.

It's largely about setting mood and tone, and then you get to the part where it becomes a story that belongs in a Ripper anthology.

"Template for a Proclamation to Save the Species" by Ramona Ausubel is one of those stories that just kicks the entire way. The opening is enough to capture me - "Perhaps it is the shittiness of the northern Minnesota town that keeps her residents from reproducing."

Boo-ya-cacha!

The story is basically about a mayor who uses an idea from Russia in the Soviet days to start a 'Love Day' where everyone has sex to try and increase the birth rate in the sleepy town.

Ausubel is an incredible writer, one who works at short length better than all but the specialists (Kelly Link, Rachel Swirsky, etc, etc) and this story on Electric Lit kicked the hell out of my brain meats.





That's all for this week!

I've got a lot of stuff coming up, and you'll be unable to avoid it. Even John Hertz will hear about it through Social Media!

The next issue should have a full novel report! A bunch more short stories, and all the regular stuff you expect. I'm working on a piece about UFOs in the 19th Century, and a ghost story or two as we come towards Halloween!!!

Coffee this time? Kauai Coffee Company Garden Isle except for the last piece, which was Original Roast from Dunkin Donuts.

