



Claims Department

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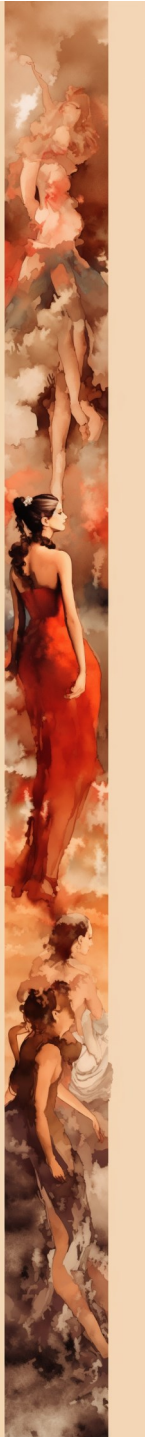
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True Crime News

This week, I look at a Food Crime.

Which reminds me that my book *Food and Crime* now has a US release date—October 7th, 2023!!!

This week, a woman got a 21 year prison sentence for attempting to murder a friend with poisoned cheesecake so she could steal her identity.

While attempted murder by cheesecake is salacious enough, there's a lot more here. Enough to make it into my next book!

So , let us start with the main character: Viktoria Nasyrova. In Russia, in 2014, she killed someone. She fled Russia to the US and has been here ever

since, laying low.

Well, laying as low as operating as a Dominatrix who robs Johns can.

She'd been working as an escort and Dom, but she was aware that a Red Notice had been issued by Interpol, meaning if law enforcement caught wind of her, they were supposed to arrest her.

She had murdered Alla Aleksenko, poisoned her in fact, and then took her life savings. This is likely what allowed her to get to the US.

Apparently, she fell into the fames Eastern Bloc East Side. There's a New York thing, where all sorts of folks from former parts of the Soviet Union and Bloc countries are drawn together, no matter what divisions might be there in the old countries. It's not at all rare for roaming globs of Russians and Bulgarians and Ukrainians and Armenians and Latvians and Serbians and on and on and on. I had a couple of great nights hanging out among them once with my friend Natasha and a great of models that she was friends with. Another, a group that started out with three of us, grew to seven, we shed four of them and gained six more, including Regina Spektor!, and then we lost and gained folks until we ended the night, me the only of the original three walking out of the breakfast spot nearly 16 hours before we set forth from the apartment I was staying at. These groups tend to not only socialize, but to support one another. It's not unusual for someone to open up their home for extended, and often open-ended stays. I remember my friend Nic saying that it wouldn't be a problem for me to get a place to stay for a week when I visited, just send Dmitry a Facebook message and he'll set me up with a

spot in one of the apartments he manages.

It's a tight and giving community.

So, she became friend with Olga Tvsyk, a Ukrainian living in New York. They were roughly the same height, had the same hair color, complexion, and basically while you might not mistake one for the other on examination, you might walk passed one and think it was the other.

The idea was Viktoria wanted to steal Tvsyk's identity and use it herself, so she brought over three pieces of cheesecake over. Viktoria ate the first two, thus proving they were all fine, like Connie eating one



of Don Altabello's cannoli in *Godfather 3*. Tvsyk ate her's, and he lost consciousness, fell over, vomited, and basically was not in a good way.

The last thing she remembered was Viktoria walking around the room.

Eventually, Viktoria walked off with Tvsyk's passport, work authorization card, and some valuables.

So, the thing about communities like the Eastern Bloc East Side is that they often check on each other, and Tvsyk had a friend come by. Viktoria had staged the scene, scattering pills around her body on



the bed as if she were endgame Marilyn Monroe. Her friend called the medics, and she ended up surviving.

Viktoria had used a drug that you could get in Russia, but not in the US, and if she had not left the cheesecake container at the scene, and if Tsvyk had actually died, she might have gotten away with it. Luckily, criminals are dumb and usually lazy.

Viktoria didn't get away this time. She was arrested, and though her lawyer is appealing based on inappropriately harsh sentencing, it's not likely to help much, as she'll almost certainly be deported back to Russia either way.





I Bought most of the Resnick *Alternate* anthologies.

Most of them are light fun. A couple have some really good stories, but for the most part, they're just nive little explorations into alternate history.

Short Count in Chicago is a fun story, and there's not much more to it than a series of references to world leaders as if they were wrestlers. This includes Krushchev, Papa Doc Duvalle, of course Eisenhower, and probably a couple of more. It's a simple bit of political fan service, I think, and while I've got my issues with such, it's fun stuff. And short, like 4 pages.

The thing is, it shows no understanding of how wrestling storytelling is different from all others. You have a story to tell, and you have to make the crowd understand that the momentary IS the overall result until the very last moment. That is to say that when the good guy is on offense, it should be

clear that he's going to win because he's the clear moral choice and no other outcome is possible. If the Bad Guy is on offense, it should feel like it's going to end up being the cheat, the fix, the insurmountable odds of the unscrupulous brawler that just couldn't be beat.

Now, this isn't to say that Jay didn't get that, it is doesn't present it. It does bring up a question that he only kinda addresses: who is the face and who is the heel?

Now, the way it's presented is that Nixon (the Trickster!) is the heel, which makes sense, though The General (Eisenhower) is clearly a beloved face and is giving him his full backing. The Hyanis Kid, Kennedy of course, and his brothers are, maybe, the hells, or perhaps something that was just coming around when Haldeman would have written it: the cool heel. They were the bad guys that people loved, think Stone Cold Steve Austin. He clearly gets the win, by cheating after a fashion, but he's also still beloved. It's weird.

This is probably my least favorite of Haldeman's sports stories, but it's not without it's chams. It might just be that I know too much about wrestling.







I played SpaceWar! with The Inventor!!!

Now, this was far from the first time, we'd played a couple of times a year at the Museum, usually for a film crew, but this was the first time since I Was laid off in 2019, and the first since the pandemic. Also the first time since he had three strokes, though he got incredibly lucky and had no long-term effects from any of them! Steve Russell, more than anyone else, is responsible for giving games to computers in the 1960s, and not just because of SpaceWar!

Well, because of the attention that SpaceWar!

Got.

You see, *Rolling Stone*, back when it was still super-relevant, did an entire GIANT article about SPaceWar, I believe written by Stewart Brand, he of the *Whole Earth Catalog*. While other games had gotten some press, notably NIMROD from the Festival of Britain. No other early computer game, and frankly, other than UNIVAC, no other computer anything, had gotten that sort of attention from a crowd who would have been appreciative.

You see, SpaceWar was distributed largely by the DECUS, the User Society for Digital Equipment Corporation. If you bought one of their minicomput-



ers, you got a papertape with SpaceWar on it. This got it out to pretty much every university that had a computer center. That meant a lot of younger players, right? And *Rolling Stone* was pretty much read by younger folks, and Ben Fong-Torres usually made sure they were the target of everything.

I'm lucky enough to have known Steve since 1999, and he even showed up at my wedding. He's coming up on 90 in not too long, and he's slowed a bit after his strokes over the last few years, but he's still got it! This time, I managed more than a couple of wins playing against him, which has never happened before! He's still got a great technique, he was the winner of the mini-Tournament we held with me, Nolan Bushnell of Atari, Al Alcorn, designer of PONG, Bill Pitts, designer of The Galaxy Game, Jordan Mechner (I think), Vint Cerf, and Jerry Pournelle. It came down to me and Steve, and I got destroyed.

I'm just glad I got a chance to play with him again!. It's a ROKU Channel doc that should be out later this year.





The National Video Registry 2020—Final

Murphy Brown

Few shows have become a major part of a Presidential campaign, but *Murphy Brown* was, but more importantly, it was one of the defining shows of the 1990s. Candice Bergin was a big star who had kinda fallen out of the public eye. The show had an exceptional ensemble cast, and the writing was very smart. Dan Quayle making the point that Murphy becoming a single mom was a bad thing is still one of the weirdest talking points in the history of American politics.

Seinfeld

No, it wasn't a show about nothing. It was a classic apartment building comedy, not unlike *The Honeymooners* or *I Love Lucy*. The show is simplistic when considered as a set of stories being told, but complex when it comes to the construction of the individual episodes. Some very smart writing, and the final episode was one of the last major episodic television events.

The Puppy Episode - Ellen

Ellen Degeneres wasn't out. It's weird, because I remember knowing, but I guess it was merely an 'well,

she's obviously a lesbian' thing as opposed to a being actually out thing. This two-parter basically outed her character and her to the public. It was a huge deal, and some point to it as a reason for the increase of LGBT-plus programming in the years immediately after. It's also a very strong two-parter!

The Oprah Winfrey Show

Hey, Oprah was in The Puppy Episode!

This was the show that made Oprah Winfrey into one of the richest women in America. Starting in Chicago, by the 1990s, it was literally everywhere, launching careers, stirring up controversy, and somehow unleashing Doctor Phil and Suze Orman on the world. It remains the highest-rated daytime talk show of all-time.

Homegrown Video #1

OK, if you're doing a list of significant video material, some of it is gonna have to be porn. It's just too big a deal. Homegrown Video was the innovator in amateur pornography starting in the early 1980s. This transition from professional to amateur porn was a significant part of the story of *Boogie Nights* and really an important aspect of the explosion of porn in the days before the internet, and even setting the table for the world of porn we know today. Number 1, or something like 800, was the introduction to the genre for many, and made the company insane amounts of money.

Dire Straights' Money for Nothin'

Let me say that my years as a computer historian dedicated to computer graphics, music, and art made me exactly the right person to take a look at this one. This was the first exposure for a generation to computer animation, and it's one of the most beloved music videos of the 1980s. It's impressive that they managed to get so many different kinds of animation in this one,

including the integration of live action and computer animation. It's one of the videos that best defines what MTV was in the middle 1980s.

Sabado Gigante

Two generations of Hispanic kids grew up with Saturday night Sabado Gigante. It was everything you could possibly want: part game show, part talent show, part general weirdness. I loved watching it, and it was a cultural touchstone for us half-breeds who sometimes felt distanced from the furthest branches of our family trees.







Frank Black is a stage name.

He's gone by Black Francis, back when he was with The Pixies, but it's as Frank Black that I think he's had the most impact on me personally, and on music in general.

I first came across Frank Black through a music video—*Headache*.

The video was a regular on *120 Minutes*, as I've written of frequently, but more importantly, it was super-cool! The song itself is one of those songs that when I hear it, it instantly makes me think of the

1990s. You can almost see the tendrils of influence flying off of it, into performers like Beck. His wild performances and fairly mundanely esoteric lyrics were just about the craziest you'll ever hear from a mainstream musician.

You must remember this was the 1990s; the alternative was the mainstream.

Frank Black's album *Teenager of the Year* was a major hit, and though I believe that *Headache* was the only single to chart (and it didn't chart too high, Number 10 on the Modern Rock charts) though it wasn't as wildly received as you'd think hearing folks talk about it now.

We weren't ready. Well, I was ready. I don't know about everyone else.

The songs were an infectious combination of punk and hard rock and folk and indy. It was the best kind of music, and I couldn't think of anyone else that had done stuff like this.

Except Bob Mould and maybe Mike Watts, but more about them much much later.

The opening song alone makes it all worth while. After a fuzzed-out intro, we get a trainwreck of cacophony that somehow feels like a choo-choo, and then we hear Frank's voice—

While everyone's virtually singing a popular song, I still believe in the excellent joy of the Pong."

If there is a lyric more suited to my interests, I am unaware of what it could be?

That song, *Whatever Happened to Pong?* is probably the best punk song on the album. It's fast, it's

fairly simple, it's simply wild! It was listening to it way back in 1994 that I got my first documentary music video idea: turn the less than 2 minutes of *Whatever Happened to Pong?* Into a documentary telling the story of Pong. I pitched it a couple of times at the museum, and it never went anywhere, but it would be a great idea!

The album that really hit me though was *Oddballs*. Now, here's the thing; it's an album of rarities and the like. The titles track is, without question, y favorite Frank Black song. He says it's him trying to be The Rolling Stones, and I can hear that, but there's more to it. It's got a punk sensibility that the Stones never really mined. It's a smoother song than almost anything on *Teenager of the Year*, but at the same time, it's got the same sort of lyrical brutality going on that makes the exterior feel functional to the existence of the interior. The message is contained in the wrapper, as it were.

He's going by Black Francis again, but to me, he's always gonna be Frank Black. It might be because I find him to be a significant part of the 1990s Modern Rock scene and that's what he went by in those days. I've tried his recent stuff, and it's good, some very good, but ultimately, it's not *Oddballs*.





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I ran into a guy at the grocery store.

OK, not literally, I should mention, but stick with me. He was in the check-out line in front of me, buying what appeared to be a Memorial Day BBQ's worth of food stuffs.

It was Memorial Day, after all.

Anyhoo, I notice his shirt—*Famous Monsters of Filmland*.

Well now, that wasn't exactly common 'round these parts.

“Like the shirt,” I said, “Forry was a friend.”

“Oh, thanks,” he said, looking down at the first issue cover printed on the black t-shirt, “did you say Forry was a friend?”

And from there, we chatted. He had picked up an issue of *Famous Monsters* when he was 7, and it changed his life. From that moment on, he wanted to make monsters.

“There was a photo of Gill-man in an issue, and I studied it so long I finally figured out how to make my own.”

I’ve read *Famous Monsters*, sure. It was around the house once in a while, and I can remember Forry talking about it a lot back in the day. I don’t remember much about it, other than the Dr. Acula stuff, honestly, because that’s what I wanted to read.

This fellow in the Safeway check-out line, though, wanted to make monsters because of Forry, and he actually went out and did it.

“I’d make things for haunted houses, small time filmmakers, parties. I worked on a movie called *The Milpitas Monster*.”

I giggled.

“I’ve seen it,” I said.

“I’m sorry,” he responded.

We chatted for a bit while the clerk did a price check, then he left and I left. I know a lot more about Forry these days, much of it more disturbing than I’d like, but also I don’t disbelieve any of it. He did inspired people, myself included, and that has a value, too. Like I always say, legacies are complicated.



OK< enough fun and Games!

I'll be working on another issue for next week, likely only one (I've somehow acquired pink eye, so I'm treating that and trying not to touch my eyes and that's harder than it sounds and WAH!)

I'm gonna be looking for a lot more material for upcoming issues. I'm still trying to catalog the stuff Henry Welch gave me, and there's a lot of it! I'm looking through *The Whole Fanzine Catalog* at the moment and am amazed at the incredible stuff that was out there in the 1990s. *Astromancer Quarterly* was another title I've absolutely been absorbed into. It might be the most beautiful zine run I've got in my collection.



