



5 Claims Department

Everything's going as it should.

Or at least as it could...

I've been prepping for Crocktober (and you should be too!) that magical month that has my birthday, and where I break out the Crock-pot and make a ton of slow-cooked meals. It's a lot of fun, and last years was damaged by the fact that I had my diabetes and high-blood pressure diagnosis during October. Luckily, I've learned some healthy eating options that can come out of a good slow-cooker and still manage to be tasty enough for the kiddes.





The Battle of Los Angeles...

...And Santa Barbara

There have been two impressive UFO panics.

The first, and most famous, was caused by the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, has become over-hyped as the years have worn on (undoubtedly helped by Orson Welle's bragging about it) and the other one actually led to five deaths.

What was going on?

And why was it called the Battle of Los Angeles when it all started in Santa Barbara???

Let's go back to a time called the opening months of World War II. February, 1942, and America is John Holmes at Eddie Nash's house-level paranoid following Pearl Harbor. There are rumors that the Japanese have submarines everywhere on the

Pacific Coast, that an aircraft carrier is positioned outside the Golden Gate, and there are spies, spies everywhere.

On February 23rd, the Japanese Navy made a first attack on the US mainland. A Japanese sub surfaced near Santa Barbara, near Goleta to be exact, and fired on one of the many oil fields. This wasn't a massive attack, barely did more damage than a car plowing through the front of a bar, but it was something that shook us up.

And the War Department took it seriously and sent out a warning that there could be a Japanese attack on the West Coast the next day - February 24th, 1942.

Now, since Pearl Harbor, they'd been installing anti-aircraft guns on positions all over the Pacific Coast. There was an entire bunker system over-looking the Golden Gate, and several placed to defend Los Angeles. Following the firing on Goleta, every finger on itchy on every trigger.

So, February 24th, it was tense, and around 7, well after dark that time of year, there were reports of flares and blinking lights over some defense plants. This called everyone to their positions, Air Raid Wardens were called into position and a blackout declared across the LA basin when the lights were reported again about 2am.

That was when all hell broke loose.

Around 315am, the anti-aircraft guns started blazing. .50 caliber machine guns fired and larger shells as well. And, like everything shot into the air, eventually they came down.

And these had real effects. There were car accidents, and three people died as a result. There were two heart attacks. I believe that makes these the largest number of deaths attributable directly to a response to a UFO.

This brings up the question - people were seeing some object flying in the sky that they couldn't identify...but what?

Now, looking at the descriptions of what people were seeing, flares and blinking lights, there are several Earth-bond options. The most likely, and the one that the Army has settled on, is a weather balloon.

If you've read my Roswell piece, you'll know that's a popular one.

That couldn't account for everything. There was a sighting of something over Long Beach, and it's highly possible that was weather balloon from the descriptions, but the one that moved inland was slightly different.

Those sounded a lot more like the reporting during the Phoenix Lights.

Blaming flares is another classic choice, and that's the official excuse for the Phoenix Lights, but few are convinced, especially by those who saw the ship outlines from the highlands in Arizona before it was fully dark. There was a report of a triangular craft that night, over Santa Maria. This was apparently before the Long Beach sighting, and afterwards, things moved inland.

The thing is, there are UFO sightings over nuclear power facilities and military installations, and have been since the late 1940s. It might make sense that they'd be seen over defense plants.

There was another excuse for most of the later sightings - the firing that the other garrisons were doing. It's not unthinkable to believe that fired shells could look like some sort of fast moving vehicle.

The idea of it being a ship kinda like those seen during the Phoenix Lights isn't out of the question, but in this case, I'm thinking weather balloon.







The Spare Man

by Mary Robinette Kowal

I'm actually reading for the Hugos this years.

Well...listening.

The first audiobook I grabbed was Mary Robinette Kowal's *The Spare Man*, and I've got to say that I've been training for this book for ages! You see, as a high school kid who was into film history and had multiple video store membership cards, I had access to VHS tapes of classic movies. I distinctly remember the big yellow MGM clamshell cases on the shelves at California Video. I believe I rented every one of them at some point or another.

And each and every one of the Thin Man movies.

You might have heard of *The Thin Man* series; Nick and Nora Charles with the cutest dog in the world, Asta. She's an heiress, while he's a retired detective. Crimes happen, and they solve them while have delicious banter and a lot of drinking.

They were wonderfully pre-Code in their delivery, at least the first couple, and they were epic amounts of fun. The writing was pinpoint-precise and the delivery even better.

Mary Robinette uses the concept and delivers a futurized version of the concept in *The Spare Man*. Tesla is an heiress to a massive fortune, and she's just wed Shal, a retired detective. Tesla was once injured and in addition to surgical repairs and various implants, has a service dog, Gimlet, who sees to her. The couple take a voyage on a space cruiser to Mars, and since she's a celebrity and her face is well-known, they're ultra-undercover.



Then, a dead woman shows up by their door, and Shal finds her, gets his prints on the knife, and ends up the chief suspect.

This is a fantastic mystery, at the same time as being a fantastic banter-heavy married couple story.

The mystery plays out like most of the Cozy Mysteries I've spent the last year listening to. The plot is smart, never hitting the classic roadblocks that so many books hit where character common sense is over-ruled by clumsy, but plot-necessary, story dynamics. There are few McGuffins, and even fewer wasted elements.

The dialogue is a perfect updating of the genre, in much the same way that 1990s Neo-Noirs managed to imbue their scripts with contemporary scripts brushed over the older concepts.

The writing is crisp, as is always the case for Mary Robinette Kowal works, and the plot moves with perfect execution. The ideas, the implants and comms systems and social changes, are wonderfully speculative, and they come into play throughout the story. Too often, it's cool tech sprinkled in just to be cool, but here they play well.

Now, as I listened to this one, I have to comment on the performance.

WOW!

She's one of the best interpreters of SF out there today, and she does an amazing job taking her own text and putting together a performance that gives such a perfect amount of nuance and emphasis, possibly because there is no one who better understands her text. There are a lot of writers whose self-interpretation suffers from being delivered as they hear it in their head, but it seems that here, that Ain't the case.

As the first Hugo nominated work I've read, it's on the top of my voting...if I had a membership. I've got to get to the others, and I think they're all available on Audible, so that's my go-to at the moment.

Of course, I have to compare this to another Hugo-nominated SF mystery, *6 Wakes*. The two are quite different, Our's book feels more like it descended from *Clue* while Mary Robinette's antecedent is clearly *The Thin Man*, They're both Manor

House Mysteries, of which the Train mystery is a small, but significant, sub-set. I think Mary's book overall has a slight edge with me because you'll seldom find anyone who is as big a SF and Mystery nerd. I happen to think both the writers are amazing humans, which always helps!

Well worth reading, and perhaps ever more well listening to as an audiobook. The style comes through, and even without a ground in the original films, it's a rewarding read because she gets the depth of concept, has an equally deep concept to lay over-top, and is just damn good at her job.







Ben Kissel Update

The Kissel scenario I wrote about 2 issues ago has had 0 movement, and a whole bunch of things happen.

So, the woman who has accused Ben, Taylor, has done a fair bit of press, a podcast and a few Instagram posts. She laid out some of her relationship with Ben and the abuse she received. She said it was his drinking, which is the consensus, that made him mean. She said that in Vegas, he had come back to the room drunk, started screaming at her while holding her pinned to the bed.

For an hour.

That's got to be terrifying, he's a giant of a man, 6'7 and 350+.

After these, many *Last Podcast on the Left* fans broke into dizzying bouts of 'Believe Her!' vs. 'Ben is Innocent!' Posting to Facebook groups and reddit and Twitter.

Though, it's also started to effect the podcasts on the Last Podcast network.

Some Place Under Neith is a podcast about missing and exploited women. It's hosted by Amber Nelson and Natalie Jean, who happens to be the wife of Henry Zebrowski of *Last Podcast on the Left*. They do a livestream on Twitch and sometimes they have Mackenzie Joy Brennan on to help them look into legal matters as she's a lawyer in New York. She made comments on Taylor's posts, and that got back to Nat and they said that it would be best for her to step away from the podcast.

Now, Mackenzie is friends with Brooke, Ben's ex, and even does a podcast with her. In an Instagram post about the matter, she said that she believed Taylor both on principal and for substantive reasons. She's been friends with members of the Last Podcast network for a while, and she says that the Last Podcast network folks are friends, and she's even had good times with Ben over the years.

But, of course, there's likely a lot un-said in those statements.

Another aspect that's come up is a true crime podcaster named Celene Cauldron. She's a pretty well-known figure, she directed *Killing Theodore* which I hear is really good stuff, but I don't follow any of her stuff. I only know her name at all because she was the one who noted that she had a weird encounter with Ben during the Billy Jensen matter last year. She said she had edibles up in her room and she'd go and get them. Ben, apparently drunk (and hanging out with Billy likely means quite drunk) and followed her to her room, and apparently put his foot in the door to keep it from closing and following her in. After she gave him the edible, he sorta lingered a moment, but then left without incident.

Now, Celeste spoke out, and apparently at the time, and continuing through, she's been harassed by *Last Podcast* fans and Ben (and likely Billy Jensen) defenders.

This is probably a good time to say that those of us in *Last Podcast* fandom can be a bunch of crusty motherfuckers. A lot of

the groups I'm in, all on Facebook, are pretty eccentric, and right now there's a lot of in-fighting with the Pro-Ben and Pro-Taylor sides, though most folks fall somewhere in-between. I'm more in the "Believe Taylor, but Let Ben get the help he needs" camp, which is another camp that is becoming popular.

The boys did release a statement on Instagram telling their listeners to knock it off with the harassing Taylor, though many are pointing to that as being not enough. A mention on one of the shows would be a good idea, a strongly word statement would also help, but they've gone this way and that's what's what at the moment.

Now, not knowing what Mackenzie knows (she's a lawyer so she's smart enough not to make statements publicly) I do think that the Celene matter is difficult. The way she describes the scenario leads me to think that drunk Ben was just clueless and thought there might be more forthcoming and when there wasn't, just left. Creepy, especially for a guy his size, but I wouldn't say it's indicative of anything save for his potential cluelessness. On the Twitch stream, Natalie made references to Celene and implied that she was putting her nose into things that weren't her business. They remained mum on the Mackenzie situation, which makes way more sense than saying anything. They are getting blow-back from the community that sees them as silencing a woman talking about supporting other women and being a show that portrays missing and exploited women. At the same time, Natalie said that they believed Taylor and supported her. That's an interesting note, and one that actually plays into the idea that they've known Ben needs help, and Mackenzie mentioned that he kept messing things up for them, but that it took something huge to make him take the cure.

One thing that popped up last week and has been largely over-looked by many is that a comedian in the orbit of The Cave where Ben, Marcus, and Henry would do comedy, mentioned that in 2014, she had been told by someone in the scene that "Ben hits women." This would be huge, and Celene mentioned it obliquely in one of her posts, but it's not raised a lot of attention. A post later by a booker at one of the New York clubs that used to book Kissel said that he'd heard allegations of Ben being forceful with

women back in 2014 as well. These, to me, make the claims from Taylor far more damning, but really, the one common thing in every story, every account, was Ben's drinking.

Notable - no one has come forth with claims that Ben hit them (I don't believe that Taylor has, just the being held on the bed for an hour thing which is bad enough) and there are going to be questions as to whether or not Ben can come back at all. Who knows? The episodes they've done since have been good, and it does kinda feel like a tryout for a full dropping of Kissel.

The thing is, we now know that Ben's in a 30 day program. There is no time-table for him to return to the podcast, and they've even stopped mentioning that he will.







On the Matter of Museum Ideas

I often think, and write, about museums.

I have ideas, though no plans, for a few museum concepts, one of which I wrote about a while back. The Museum of the American Magazine. I've actually done a little work on the idea and I even got a website.

This may mean I have to do it.

I've made a top ten list (Rolling Stone, Playboy, Esquire, The New Yorker, Reader's Digest, Better Homes & Gardens, Life, Time, Sports Illustrated, People) and a Most Wanted List. I've got a bunch of things scanned and ready to post to the site, mostly 1930s through 50, but a few much older things, and will be a soft opening.

The idea does need one thing - a place.

At some point, if it takes off, I'm gonna need a storage and display space. I can probably store for the short term at my house, and libraries have display places!!! Whoopee!!!

I do plan on including zines, fanzines in specific, and I've got a list of them that I want to collect made-up too!

I'm big on lists.

So, what's it gonna be? I'm gonna start by putting up a few Magazines from the Public Domain years (1927 as of today) and a few snapshots of newer stuff.





I've been sleeping on the couch.

No, Vanessa and I haven't been fighting (in fact, this has been one of the nicer periods of our marriage, just general money difficulties instead of major catastrophes like several periods of our lives together) but I've had some stomach issues, and Vanessa has a sensitive nose. Basically, I've been sleeping on the couch, and it's been kinda nice, even as much as I miss snuggling.

Our couch is pretty comfy, a double recline sort of set-up that we cover with a lamb pelt to make it extra comfy.

It also means that I stay up a little later than usual.

I like to be asleep by 10 or at the latest 11. I get up about 5:15 or so in the morning so that the kids can have their breakfast about 6, and I have a chance to check eMail and TikTok and so on. On the couch, I'm usually up until about 1130 or so.

I do manage to sleep until 515, though, so that's a wash!

Now, JP has a fever, and Vanessa just turned out to have a sore throat, and that's a bad thing, and just as I was about to move back into the bedroom, I'm back on the couch for the next night or two.

At least I'll get a bunch more writing done.





OK, that's all for this one.

My buddy Doug Berry has been in the hospital for a while now, at least a week. His lungs are in really bad shape. He's had a rough medical history, I believe Hodgekings and a couple of strokes, but when I saw him at BayCon this year, he was still Doug, and there's a lot to love about the guy. The phrase that always comes to mind is from Hunter S. Thomson - "There he goes, one of God's own prototypes."

That's Doug.

He'd been on a BiPAP, to varying levels of success, and yesterday, his wife posted that he'd been put on to a ventilator.

That's not good.

I always love getting the chance to see Doug, and it's never been as often as I'd like.

I hope for a miracle, or at least a fair cheating of the odds, but...fuck.



