



Claims Department

This is a semi-regular statement -

I'm doing OK.

This January is busier than most, which isn't to say that I'm harried or anything, but a lot of stuff is goin' on and it's fun!

First off: NESSA FOR TAFF!!!

That's right, my darling wife is running for the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, and we're excited! She'd be a great representative and the race should be a blast! The opposition is the wonderful Sarah Gulde!!!

And yes, I'm one of her nominators.

Why? Because 1) she'd be a great representative for TAFF, I've worked with her on *Journey Planet*, and she had Randy Byers' support when she first stood. I nominated her before, and I absolutely would nominate her again! She's great!

I'm hoping to do a dual-campaign zine with the two of them, but we'll see! I'm helping Vanessa with her campaign newsletter (The Nessasary) and other stuff, but you absolutely can't go wrong voting for either!

I'm taking the kids to wrestling on Saturday. Wish me luck.





The Beaches

Every now and then, I pretend that music didn't reach perfection between the years of 1986 and 1995 and go out and try to find new stuff to listen to.

It's a task that has led me into interesting new sounds (Maximo Park in 2009, Pixx in 2017) and I decided it was time to give it a shot again. Turns out that, yes, there is very good music still coming out, and I found two acts that I can whole-heartedly get behind.

The Last Dinner Party is a great band out of the UK, and their first album will be out in a month, but the one that got me the deepest was The Beaches.

Let's start with the fact that they're Canadian. That's a given, right? All great bands are some flavor of Canadian these days, right?

They've been around for a while, but broke through in the US with their album *Blame My Ex*, and specifically with the song *Blame Brett*. It's an incredible pop song, with the kind of self-awareness that borders on loving self-hatred.

I'm sorry in advance
I'm only gonna treat you bad
I'm probably gonna let you down
I'm probably gonna sleep around
So sorry in advance
Before you take off your pants
I wouldn't let me near your friends
I wouldn't let me near your dad

They follow that series up with "don't blame me, blame Brett. Blame my ex, blame my ex, blame my ex"

You can see this isn't about holding one's self accountable; it's about not wanting to change but still having a good excuse. The song is bouncy, peppy, and recalls those great bands of the 1990s doing powerpop like The Smithereens or The Tragically Hip. I love it!

They follow that masterful piece of work with a great song title for a really good song *What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Paranoid*.

Frankly, the entire album is super-solid, with only one or two songs, mostly slower numbers, that feel like let-downs. It's interesting that this sort of Sleater-Kinney meets The Cardigans sound is hitting right now, but it sure does!

The Beaches are about to start touring in the US shortly, though I doubt I'll get to see 'em.





The London Séance Society

Sometimes, I actually try to keep up.

Now, while I'm not a huge fantasy fan, I'm a big historical fiction nerd, though I'm much bigger into the whole mystery thing, and when the twain do meet, I'm there for it.

I pitched this to Vanessa as "it's a Victorian murder mystery with paranormal charlatanism, and lesbians" and she seemed sold on

it from that point forward!

The story is there's a medium, Vaudeline D'Allaire, is working on training a new woman to mediumate: Lenna Wickes. The two end up being hired to go and solve the murder of the President of the London Séance Society by one of the vice-presidents. The Society is embroiled in a scandal about faking stuff during seances, and since they don't allow women, the two of them have to dress like dudes.

It's that kind of story!

There are a few twists and turns, and there's a budding relationship drama that goes on to (and at times is pretty damned sexy!) and this is clearly a historical fiction (magical realism?) and it's awesome. The mystery takes a sort-of backseat to the interpersonal, but at the same time, the characters are so damned compelling.

Sarah Peller is a helluva writer. She prosed better than many folks I've been listening to lately, and the performances here are fantastic. I love audiobooks that give point-of-view characters individual readers so you're not getting a single voice when perspective changes. This is one of my favorite things here, and allows for deception in the text, as it were, and makes things feel a whole lot more interesting. The performances here are great overall, and it lends itself to performance really well.

Where does it fall in with the cozies I've been reading lately?

It's very different, but the ideas are the same. There's a character who has lost someone close to them and that's forced them into being a detective, and there's a secret with our main characters, which certainly feels like they'd fit. When I think of the paranormal cozy mysteries I've read, they put things in a much less spooky form, and here that is the aesthetic.

I'd 100% recommend it, and it'll be on my Hugo ballot.

