

## The New Normality

I was thinking about "Vintage Season" again last month. A beautiful October in North Florida, and everything is as it's been for the last decade or so except that people are worried they're going to get a disease out of techno thriller novels just from opening their mail. Let's face it, folks, as scary as anthrax through the mail is you still have a better chance of dying from someone running you over in his flag decorated SUV than from a terrorist attack. The "Vintage Season" connection is this one: will we look back at the WorldCon in early September and remember that as the last innocent time before it all went to hell in a handbasket? I hope not, but we already know we're looking at things differently than we did a couple months ago.

The Chinese were right. "May you live in interesting times" is a curse after all.

### Autumn in New England:

Raphi and Howard traveled up to Boston at the end of October to check out colleges. Raphi complained that whenever he flies now he gets pulled out to be searched.

"It's that suspicious

looking beanie on your head," I told him. "And the blonde beard-- definitely adds to your sinister appearance. And your sarcastic attitude--"

"OK, I get it, Ema."

Anyway, they stopped at Brandeis, Harvard, Brown, Tufts and Yale, spending the most time at Brandeis. We've got strong Brandeis ties--our former rabbi and close family friend is now the chaplain there, many of Raphi's friends from camp and United Synagogue Youth are at Brandeis and Howard has friends in the faculty. So it's definitely on the short list of colleges we're applying to.

But Raphi's favorite was Yale.

"It's just like Hogwarts!" he said when he phoned from New Haven.

Harvard impressed him, but



he said the tour guide appeared to be a clear example of how if your family gives enough money to Harvard over four generations they *will* let you in, grades and brainpower notwithstanding.

Tufts and Brown didn't make the cut, and he's still toying with the idea of traveling to Chicago to check out UC, but the applications are going out and the race is on to see which school gets him.

Micah has started his banjo lessons, following through on a commitment he and I made when he first bought his banjo last year. If he brought home all A's and B's, even once, I would buy him banjo lessons. He squeaked past during the first nine weeks of high school though it was touch and go for a while there, especially in math. But he's got his lessons and he's happy about it. I'm less than 100% thrilled because instead of reading from regular sheet music his teacher uses the kind of notation system popularized in

### Stuff

**Eve Ackerman**

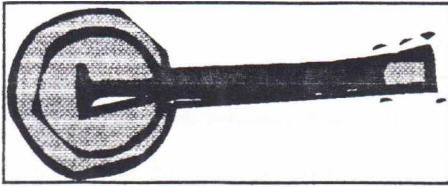
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Nashville for people who don't



read sheet music. But the important thing, I tell myself, is that Micah enjoys his teacher, he practices, and he is learning banjo.

Micah and I attended a Bela Fleck/Edgar Myer concert last month and got to see the best of banjo playing and classical strings together. Bass and banjo is an unusual combination but it works and listening to Bela Fleck under any circumstances is a delight. But it was different.

## Speaking of Hogwarts...

I just loved the movie. Loved it. Thought the casting was right on target, though it didn't need Richard Harris to play Dumbledore (not like it needed Alan Rickman to play Snapes). But it was all good. I hope the current cast is committed to future movies and if they continue along this path, it will be a success.

We worked on Howard to read the books, or at least the first one, before he saw the movie. Howard surprised me and read all four books. I was surprised because he generally doesn't read novels since he has so much work related reading to do. But he did enjoy them and I have to believe

he enjoyed the movie more because he'd been prepped by the books.

## "Good novelists are thieves and liars"

That was a friend's sig and there's a lot of truth to it. More and more I'm finding that almost any situation, any piece of information one picks up can be "stolen" and put in place in your "lies", your fiction. A friend of Raphi's was at the house one evening talking with me about the girl who stole her boyfriend:

"She puts out more than a gumball machine."

My first thought on hearing this was, "Ooooh, I like that. I'm going to have to remember that one for a contemporary novel."

It's all grist for the mill.

So the writing continues as do the rejection letters from agents. But I keep sending 'em out, and I know the right one will come along.

One thing I have done is change the working title of CAPTAIN SINISTER, now in revisions. Too many people snickered as their first reaction to the title. So I began playing around. If PIRATE'S PRICE was the first book, maybe I could title the second along the same lines. Even though it's not a sequel it's in the same setting and a couple characters from the first book do make an appearance.

So what to call it?

PIRATE'S HOPE was good, but it sounded like an "inspirational" according to one person I ran it past. PIRATE'S DREAM was good, but it didn't do anything for me. PIRATE'S PRIZE was only one letter off from "Price" and too confusing.

Then I began thinking--is there a unifying theme in this book? PIRATE'S F\*CK seemed a bit over the top. Once I began really studying it though I realized where PIRATE'S PRICE had a lot of poetry, especially the poetry of Andrew Marvell, the new book had a lot of singing. The hero has a fine singing voice, the second banana serenades his fiancée, newlyweds are treated to a chivaree and so on. So the new working title is PIRATE'S SONG.

We'll see if it makes a better impression on the agents and editors.

## Reviews!

ANGEL OF DESTRUCTION--Susan R. Matthews--I've reviewed Matthews books before, and it's no secret I'm a big fan of her tormented torturer hero, Andrej Kosciusko. But it was nice to see that Matthews can branch off into different areas in the same universe. I've read her other books that aren't set in the Judiciary universe, and they were very good, but I think it's even more interesting when she goes back to her starting ground but has different characters than Andrej

and his crew.

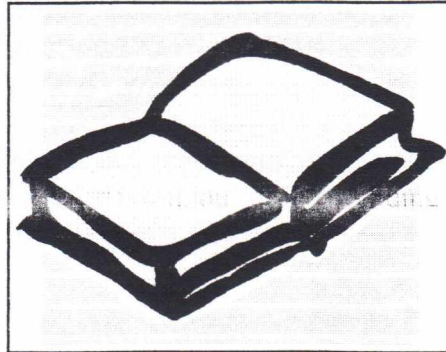
In *ANGEL* we're back in the totalitarian setting of the Judiciary. The Langsarik objected to their sector of the galaxy being annexed by the Judiciary and turned their merchant ships into pirate ships to prey on their oppressors. But the Judiciary crushed them and offered an amnesty that bans them from space travel, an amnesty painstakingly worked out by Bench Specialist Garol Vogel.

Now the amnesty is threatened as raids resume that leave no survivors but point to the Langsariks as the culprits. Vogel knows what will happen to the Langsariks if the Judiciary thinks they've broken the amnesty, and torture and involuntary servitude would be just the beginning.

Matthews has again created characters who try to do the right thing while working under a system that perpetuates its own evils. Garol Vogel is a thoughtful hero and the supporting cast is well drawn, though the best secondary character is "Cousin" Stanocz, a servant of the Malcontent, the religious opposition to the ruling church. The Malcontent are cut off from the rest of society for many reasons, not the least of which is their engaging in same sex relationships.

Fans of Matthews' previous books will enjoy *ANGEL* and while I can't say for certain how someone coming fresh to the series will enjoy it, I have to

believe that the writing and worldbuilding is good enough to let *ANGEL* stand on its own.



### NORTH OF CLEVER-- Suzann Ledbetter

Suzann Ledbetter's mystery novels set in *Sanity, Missouri* leave fans either gnashing their teeth or deeply satisfied or both with their "relationship left hanging" endings. And the release of the next book is eagerly anticipated not just because it's a good read, but because it picks up the action exactly where the last book left off. And so it goes in *NORTH OF CLEVER*, the third "compass point" book in Ledbetter's series.

When we last left Hannah Garvey, the resident manager for Valhalla Springs (a retirement community in the Ozarks filled with senior citizens with too much time on their hands, too active imaginations, and a burning desire to interfere in Hannah's life) Hannah was finally getting close to consummating *her* burning desire for hunky sheriff David Hendrickson. It's sufficient to say

nothing in Hannah's life seems to work out quite as planned.

And that leads to *NORTH OF CLEVER*. When the circus comes to town it includes an illusionist who claims to have performed one of the most important disappearing acts in Hannah's life. Reilly Boone says he's Hannah's father. Hannah's skeptical and hopeful, David's just skeptical, and the happy reunion gets hindered by the murder of Reilly Boone's wife during the circus performance of the bullet catch trick. It doesn't help that Reilly is the one who fired the fatal shot and ends up, not surprisingly, arrested for murder. It's up to Hannah, David, and the crew from Valhalla Springs to catch the murderer and get to the bottom of Reilly's claims.

OK, so I figured out whodunnit and why by the middle third of the book. That doesn't matter. What matters is Ledbetter continues to entertain readers with her skillful depiction of life in a community that seems just a little out of kilter with the rest of society, a special place in the Ozarks that's North of Clever, South of *Sanity*, East of *Peculiar* and will soon be West of *Bliss*. What happens then? It's anybody's guess, but Ledbetter is building up a legion of loyal fans who appear poised to follow anywhere the compass points them.

**MAILING COMMENTS,  
SFPA 223:**



**OO--** Please change my email address to eackerman@compuserve.com in the Roster. I'll get mail if you use the numeric address, but the other is easier to remember. Thanks.////##

**Dengrove--**I was fine reading your 'zine until I got to "...Cyril's Israeli cousins arrived. They were charming."

Do you know how disorienting it is to see the words "Israeli" and "charming" in the same sentence? Doesn't happen very often, I assure you. And then there was: "It is safer to live in Israel than it was to drive." I think you got confused. That sentence should read "You're safer from terrorists than you are from Israeli drivers." ////###

**Hlavaty--**Ct. Me: Good question about the men's kinky underwear, but if you don't mind I'd rather pass on the option of doing my own research one-on-one.//

Sorry I didn't get a chance to call you when I was in NYC, but next time for sure.////##

**Gelb--**The entire zine was interesting but I especially enjoyed BELOW THE BELTWAY. The discussion on mid-calf length skirts made me laugh out loud. Thanks for sharing!////##

**Cleary--**Nice zine. I enjoyed seeing the mastheads of the various contributors used in the MC's, and Leana's Dragon\*Con report was entertaining. It's unlikely I'll ever attend Dragon\*Con since it falls so close to WorldCon, but it's fun reading a well written con report.////##

**Larson--**Good to hear you, the twins and the horse are all doing well.// Your vacation at a villa sounds like a wonderful getaway. My brother mentioned last week how nice it would be if we could take a week cruise, just the grownups and if we can get my other brothers and their wives into the loop it would be eight of us. I'm not crazy about bigship cruising, being more of a Windjammer fan, but he's got MS and I know the large cruise ships are a good move for people with disabilities or restricted mobility. My sister in law said she just wants to make sure wherever we go this winter is *hot* (they're in Minnesota) so I'm going to begin checking around.////##

**Weber--**I loved the rhinos on coke piece. What a great idea, and I only wish I'd known this when I was working at the drug treatment center! Thanks for sharing.////##

**Copeland, L--**Thanks for sharing the pig sculptures. Gainesville's trying to get underwriters for fiberglass Gators

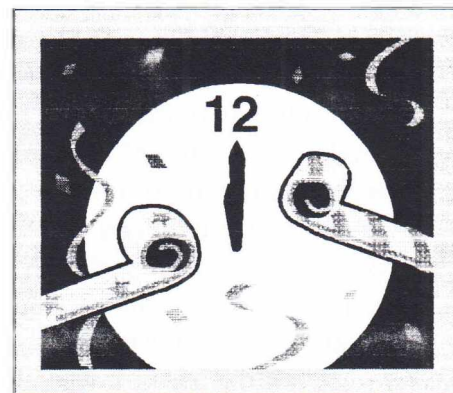
to be placed around town, similar to Chicago's cows and what other venues have done. But we'd have to go far to have something as whimsical and classy as your pigs.////##

**Copeland, J--**Your entire zine was excellent, great cartoons, but I was moved to comment by your review of CLERKS and MALLRATS. I was explaining at dinner the other night that PIRATE'S SONG isn't a sequel to PIRATE'S PRICE, but it's set in the same milieu and two characters from PRICE make an appearance in a scene in SONG.

"You mean like 'Silent Bob and Jay'?" Raphi said.

"Exactly!"

Howard's still confused, even though we did try to explain it to him.////##



**Happy Holidays!**

**Eve**