

# GUILTY PLEASURES

#26, for SFPA for SFPA 230

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Copyright November, 2002

By Eve Ackerman

**OK,** so I got some more agent rejection letters. It wasn't all bad. One said I was a talented writer, but she didn't feel the "100% enthusiasm" for my book necessary to take on a new client in today's tough market. Another said she thought I had a very good story but she wasn't taking on new clients because she's been sick. Like that's *my* problem? But I got right back on that horse, sending out more agent letters this week. And I'm still writing.

In fact, as I type this I'm sitting out on our back porch, enjoying a little break before I get back to **SMUGGLER'S GOLD**. There's a woodpecker busy pecking for insects in the dead pine. I feel guilty because that tree's going to come down at the end of the month and then where will he go? If the tree weren't close to the house I'd leave it alone. Dead trees are a valuable part of the ecosystem, used by nesting animals, insect eating animals and others. But close to my house it's an insurance claim waiting to happen so Mr. Woodpecker's going to be **SOL**, or as one of my characters says in **SMUGGLER'S GOLD**, "10 feet above the high water mark on dry land."

That last one comes from a wonderful resource called **CRACKER TIMES AND PIONEER LIVES** that's just chock full of interviews and writing from 19<sup>th</sup> C. North Florida residents discussing their daily lives in imitable fashion. I've also used "She ain't furnished in the upper story" (she's dumb) and "he cried like he had the cryin' contract for the whole neighborhood" and "he's so dumb he'd cut down a tree to get a turkey."

I love this stuff.



In the meantime, we took a trip to Boston to see how much money we could unload at Target on a Sunday afternoon. Raphi helped. It was Parents' Weekend at Brandeis and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, even if we did get a taste of Friday afternoon rush

hour traffic trauma leaving the airport (you get so spoiled living in a small town!). The weather too was less than delightful, with Tropical Storm Kevin socking a steady mizzle over the New England coast the entire time we were there.

But we still had a good time. We went straight to Raphi's dorm when we arrived 'cause it was so close to the Sabbath. I changed into a skirt and sweater in his room (his roommates were gone) while he ducked into the shower next door. The fact that it was the Women's Shower didn't faze Raphi, and this seems to be more custom than exception in his co-ed dorm. Howard was taken with the sight of young ladies clad only in towels walking through the hallways going to and from the showers. Raphi may complain about his dorm being a dump, but Howard liked it just fine.

We went to the Hillel (Campus Jewish Center) Sabbath supper with the other families and students and sat with a couple

## What it is

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from South Florida who'd recently moved to the States from Mexico. Their daughter was a freshman. Another woman and her two daughters were from the New York area, and they had a guest, a young woman from Stern College who knew my nephew Michael Ackerman at YU, Stern being the



women's college at Yeshiva University in NYC. Small world.

There were lots of jokes during supper about calling 911 'cause two weeks earlier a round of food poisoning had laid out everyone in the kosher cafeteria, but we emerged unscathed and well fed.

Afterwards there were a variety of programs to choose from, including a Sabbath lecture on Jewish ethics and genetic research so we dropped in on that event in the new student union building. Wherever we went students called out to Raphi and stopped for introductions and we could quickly see he'd made himself right at home in the Brandeis community. One of the many reasons we were glad he picked Brandeis over UF was the 6,000 Brandeis students vs. 50,000 at UF.

Raphi also talked about how Brandeis can be a learning experience for non-Jewish students

who suddenly find themselves in the minority. His buddy Weldon is from New Mexico and was sitting around one evening with some of the kids from his dorm. They were joking about some holiday and told Weldon they'd make him an honorary Jew so he could participate.

Weldon looked at them and said, "That's like you going to Boston College and being told they're going to make you an honorary Catholic so you can participate in Mass. You might not find it amusing."

And Weldon's getting some education too from Raphi. They're "Warcraft" buddies and Weldon was getting annoyed because during the holiday period Raphi wasn't free any weekend to play.

"What if you unplug the computer so it's just running off batteries, can you use it then?"

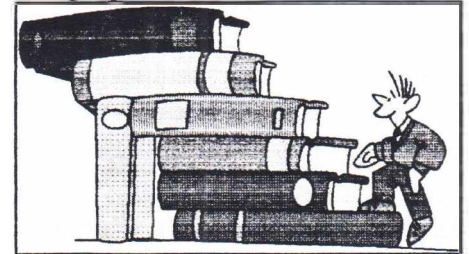
"No," Raphi said, "I can't use it at all if it's electric and I have to manipulate it."

"What if you *tell* someone what moves to make and they push the buttons for you?" Weldon cried in frustration.

But now that the holidays are over I think Weldon's getting his fix. I also met Raphi's roommates, Andrew from Maine (who's slipped neatly into the role of Raphi's *shabbes goy*, turning lights on and off for him on the Sabbath) and David from New York. I told Raphi to make sure Andrew knows Elvis was *shabbes goy* for the Memphis rabbi so it's a

position with some history and connections.

Speaking of electronics, Raphi also took us to Best Buy on Sunday to get his high school graduation and birthday gift, a Handspring PDA. Now he can play games all the time instead of studying.



I think though cracking the books isn't an issue. Raphi's RA told us she kept trying to lure him to a Salsa dance party the previous week and he insisted he needed to study, even though she insisted he was studying *way* too much to be healthy. I told her I appreciated her concern. Sort of. Actually, Raphi likes studying in the RA Yanina's room 'cause it's much quieter than his room, and they make good study partners. Yanina is Turkish, and that was the other thing that impressed me about Brandeis. Even though the majority of its students are North American Jews, it has a strong commitment to diversity and an international student body.

The weekend was spent in Sabbath activities, supper Saturday night at a kosher Chinese restaurant in Brookline with the chaplain (our former rabbi) and his wife, a "street fair" and barbecue showcasing Brandeis student

organizations and later Sunday afternoon the aforementioned shopping trip. We'd been driving my niece's SUV and went back to Logan airport Sunday evening to pick her up. Leslie is studying for a graduate degree in Psychology at Antioch, which has a program in New Hampshire for working students.

When we retrieved Leslie we picked up Raphi again and headed into Legal Seafoods in Newton, one of our favorite chain restaurants. Leslie brought me up to date on Ackerman family goings on since she'd spent the weekend at a *bat mitzvah* I would have attended had I not been in Boston. She also promised to take Raphi shopping for a real winter coat since he wouldn't let me take him. Since she's a Minnesotan born and bred I figure she'll know what to get, both in style and warmth, but I did encourage her to use her credit card for the purchase. She laughed.

Micah was home with his USY (United Synagogue Youth) advisor keeping him company. We hired Mark 'cause I didn't feel comfortable leaving a 15 year old on his own, no matter how much that 15 year old swore nothing would happen. And I believed him, actually. But as I explained to Micah, I felt better having an adult there who could drive in case of emergency, and would be on hand if there was a problem. It worked out very well and Mark took Micah to the UF Hillel for Sabbath supper and to the Gator

Game Saturday night. They had a super time.



## Books!

### March

### Upcountry/March to the Sea--David Weber and John

**Ringo--**I never used to consider myself a fan of military SF, but either my tastes are changing or the books are getting better. Maybe both.

#### MARCH

UPCOUNTRY/MARCH TO THE SEA are the first two books in what I hope will only be a trilogy (the next one is MARCH TO THE STARS) about a company of Marines in a galactic empire, charged with keeping alive a spoiled, petulant prince who's third in line to the throne. When their ship is sabotaged and forced to land on a primitive jungle planet, the marines have to adapt to their new surroundings and Prince Roger has to grow up in hurry.

These books aren't for everyone, because they're essentially one firefight after another as Roger and the dwindling ranks of marines make their way to a spaceport to get a ship home. And they may find more problems at the spaceport where Roger's enemies, the "Saints" (kind of eco-terrorist/PC types) may be laying a trap for him.

The old, tired line "Join the marines, travel to exotic lands, meet new people and kill them" takes on new meaning as the humans make both allies and enemies among the four armed, massive, slimy Mardukians. The planet itself is a giant death trap, and if the killer caterpillars don't get them, the lack of nutritional supplements might.

But given all that, if you like a rousing military yarn, if you still enjoy watching old movies based on Kipling stories, then you'll likely enjoy the Weber/Ringo team.

What can I say, it's a change from romance novels. ///

### Wet Grave--

### Barbara Hambly--

I am a huge fan of Barbara Hambly's mysteries featuring Dr. Benjamin January, a "free man of color" living in antebellum New Orleans. WET GRAVE is the latest January offering and it is a most satisfying read, combining pirates, slave revolts, New Orleans



society and the complex lives of the slaves, Creoles, Americans and free coloreds who made up New Orleans society before the War.

January doesn't fit in either the black or white society. The whites don't trust a free colored man who's better educated than most of them (he studied in Paris) and the blacks don't accept him because he's as dark as an African and the free community prizes fair skin every bit as much as the white community.

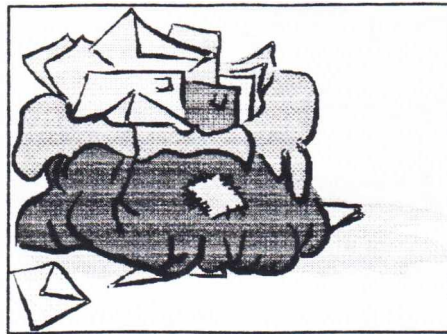
But Benjamin perseveres, partly with the support of Rose Vitrac, herself a free woman who tries to earn a living tutoring in Greek and Latin.

When an old whore is found murdered in her shack no one seems to care except Ben. What's one more dead, drunk black whore in New Orleans? But Ben remembers when Hesione LeGros was a pirate's mistress, socializing with the Lafitte brothers and the other freebooters of Baratavia, and the more he looks into her death the more suspicious he becomes that it's not a random killing.

Longtime fans of the series (and I do recommend starting with A FREE MAN OF COLOR, the first January novel) will rejoice over the return of familiar faces. New readers will find enough backstory that they won't feel like they're missing much. And everyone will enjoy the roller coaster ride of a mystery that culminates in hurricanes, pirate treasure, being up to your ass in

alligators and many players who turn out not to be what they seem. It's a great series for history buffs.

## MAILING COMMENTS! SFPA 229



**(Typed to the  
music of Dick Dale,  
King of the Surf  
guitar, off his new  
CD "Spatial  
Disorientation".)**

**Lynch--**Raphi's scholarship carries with it the opportunity to attend certain cultural events during the year. Tonight he's going to see THE MAGIC FLUTE and I'm excited for him. I think

it's an excellent first opera for a non-opera fan to attend. The storyline makes no sense, but it's colorful and the music is wonderful.// We have fiberglass Gators around town in various outfits and poses, much like Chicago's cows and DC's donkeys and elephants. It's become quite the in-thing for communities to raise funds and have their mascot animals on display. Ocala, just south of us did horses a while back, highlighting their best known product, racehorse farms.

Ct. Me. I wasn't clear on why Raphi's USY group didn't tour more of DC. It wasn't because it was DC and they were afraid of safety and security issues, it was because they were a Jewish, largely Zionist group (with a lot of Israelis in attendance and on staff) and have become much more sensitized to security issues. All Jewish institutions have ever since the shootings at the Jewish Community Center in California. The same concerns and precautions would have been in place had they been in Chicago or Denver.

This year's international conference is in Orlando and security will again be very tight. I don't know if they have any plans to visit attractions in Orlando or not.////##

**Schlosser--**I was thinking about you yesterday. I went to donate blood, the tech inserts the needle into my arm--and

blood spurted up all over my white t-shirt and face. *She* was horrified but one of the more experienced techs just came over, sponged me down with hydrogen peroxide and explained to this girl that she's supposed to keep her thumb down to avoid these mishaps. Any idea what the tech did wrong so I know to look for it next time? Oh, and my t-shirt washed out fine, sparing Life South from having to buy me a new one. It was a Coolmax model from Early Winters and a particular favorite for layering.//

ct.Me: The issue of Raphi spending the night with the young ladies is one I considered for about 20 seconds. He's over 18 and I have confidence in his ability to make reasonably good decisions. I feel the same way about Micah, btw. Micah goes to jam band concerts downtown at a local bar/band venue about once every six weeks. He's always behaved well, doesn't drink or do drugs (to the best of my knowledge) and goes to school the next day without complaint, even if he's been up until 2:00 a.m. We have an understanding--I'm willing to let him do this on occasion because I have confidence in his decision making skills. And the first time he proves me wrong, he's going to wish he'd never been born. It's a simple system, but it works for us.//###

**Brown**--Good luck on the househunting. Knowing what property values are like at that end

of the state I don't envy you your purchase price, but I agree it's a good time to buy based on interest rates.// Great con report. I don't know if I ever mentioned that my friend Diana Gabaldon, who recently signed a \$10M book contract, used to write "Scrooge McDuck" comics. She's done a piece that I've got in my archives somewhere on how everything she needed to know about good fiction writing she learned from doing Scrooge McDuck--setting up action and conflict in the first panel, how to move the story along, etc. I've cut back my own buying to mostly DC Batman titles, along with Green Arrow and Birds of Prey. Raphi wanted me to ship the comics up to him in Boston when I was done, but I told him he'd have to wait for winter break, and then only if he cleaned his snake's cage first.

//ct. Me: Brandeis is in Boston (Waltham, actually), but you're correct, it's a great resume school. There is a baseball connection though. Now that he's in Boston Raphi's given up wearing his Yankees cap. It wasn't that he was a huge Yankees fan, he just liked the fit of this particular cap. But enough comments from the Bostonians convinced him he'd like another cap just as well.//###

**Gelb**--The cartoons were fun, as always. I particularly enjoyed "Read the card! Read the card!"// Micah heard a news report

on upscale macaroni and cheese and thought it was a joke 'til I told him about the fancy schmancy restaurants in Northern California. Which I thoroughly enjoyed. It's a good con report--not at all rambling and I've now seen the first appearance of the Melbourne in '10 flyer post WorldCon.//###

**Me**--Since I mentioned

Micah's forthcoming grades in my last report, I'm pleased to say that the first nine weeks he brought home 3 A's and 3 B+'s, and the lower grades are in Honors/AP classes so they're actually weighted higher than the standard 3.5.

This is quite an improvement from last year's closing GPA of 2.3. Interestingly, Micah declined guitar lessons as a reward. He said he didn't think he should be rewarded for doing the work he's capable of doing and should be doing.

I think that kid's a keeper.

**Weisskopf**--Ct. Me:

The two books on the Coast Guard I've got listed in my bibliography are THE COAST GUARD UNDER SAIL--THE U.S. REVENUE CUTTER SERVICE, 1789-1865, Irving H. King, 1989, Naval Institute Press and U.S. COAST GUARD AND REVENUE CUTTERS, 1790-1935, Donald L. Canney, 1995, Naval Institute Press. Are those the books you have?

I get NIP books through inter-library loan services and I also found some valuable Coast Guard info (and pix of their early uniforms) at their website. My favorite comment on the uniforms was how the Navy wanted to force the Coast Guard into gray uniforms in the 1830's and the CG rebelled against this, claiming dark blue was the only appropriate color for uniforms worn at sea. That of course reminded me of Honor Harrington being forced into a navy blue uniform and neck tie while serving with the Grayson navy, and her wondering why the uniform wasn't space black as a proper naval uniform should be?//

The Coast Guard research was interesting at a number of levels because their mission is different from the other military branches. Or as I say in **SMUGGLER'S GOLD**:

"\$1,500 worth of coffee coming in duty free meant a tidy profit, whether it was Delerue-Sanders behind the smuggling or someone else. A simple plan, but one that worked all too well given the poor state of the Revenue Marine. The Revenue cutters couldn't begin to cover all of the coast, especially when the ships were spread thin with other duties: surveying, rescue operations and winter cruising between Charleston and Key West. Underfunded, understaffed, looked down on by the regular navy, despised by the merchants who paid the tariffs, the Revenue Marine was no one's darling.

Except maybe Alexander Hamilton, he'd loved his Revenue cutters that brought money into the Treasury, but look what happened to him, Washburn thought. Piss off the wrong person and there you are, worm food."

I also liked the Coast Guard because until recently it was the only branch where women saw combat on a regular basis, allowing them to move up the promotion ladder more quickly than their sisters in the other branches.////###

**Robe--**Ct. Me: While the undergraduate degree in and of itself has become devalued, where you do your undergraduate work can make a difference when you apply to grad school. In Raphi's case he got accepted to four universities, including the state school in his back yard. Interestingly, many students from his IB class chose to go to UF when they could have gone elsewhere, but in Raphi's case the dynamics were a bit different. If he didn't go to UF, and wanted instead to go to another state school, he had the problem of not having the infrastructure he needed for his daily life--access to kosher food, Sabbath services within walking distance, and a reasonably large pool of Jewish women to date. That eliminated most of the other schools in this state. So he knew he'd be applying to urban schools up north, though Emory

was also a possibility, hence the applications to Chicago, Northwestern, Harvard, Yale, Penn and Brandeis, with the latter encouraging him strongly to apply there when he did his college tour.

Obviously the scholarship was the deciding factor, but had it not been offered Raphi would likely have gone to Chicago rather than UF, even though UF offered free tuition too. I just feel fortunate that unlike my own college career, that was an option for him both in terms of his parents having put money in a college fund and his having the grades to earn admission to a top tier school.

Oh, and Raphi found a new dojo to study at. I don't recall which school it is--one of the odd little Korean styles--but he said it's compatible with Cuong Nhu and his new sensei sent a lovely note to Raphi saying he's adjusted faster than any black belt he's ever had change styles.

After seeing the mountains of junk food in his dorm room, I'm just pleased Raphi's not succumbing to the dreaded "Freshman 15." He looks as trim as ever, and the regular exercise is good for his mental health too.////###

**Happy  
Thanksgiving all!  
Eve**