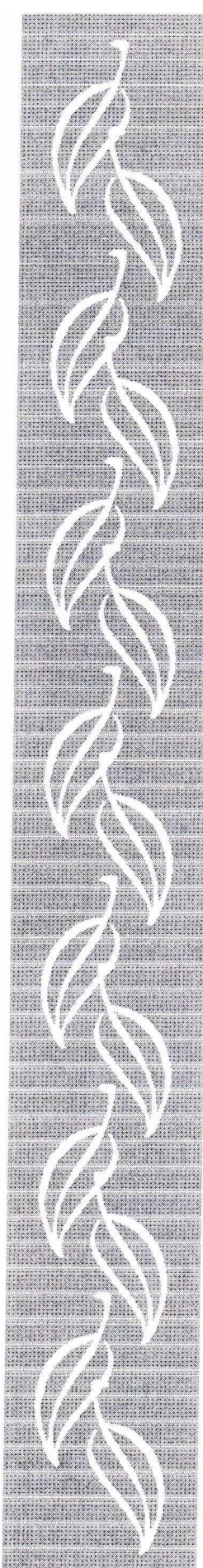


# GUILTY PLEASURES 25

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*A* neighbor passed me when I was walking Yofi this morning and said, "So is the nest half empty, or is it half full?"

I started to say "empty", but the more I thought about it the more I realized it wasn't the right answer.

"The nest is half full," I said with a grin.

Raphi is off to Brandeis. Of course, the first thing that happened was Micah's bed broke--a box frame that holds a mattress--so it may be time for doing some redecorating in the boys' rooms. Small redecorating, as the bills up in Waltham, MA mount.

We're adjusting, though Rosh Hashanna was difficult. Not having Raphi with us for the first time in 19 years made the holiday bittersweet, or as I said in an e-mail to a friend, "...On the other hand, this year I don't have to save the turkey wings for anyone in particular as our wing lover has flown the nest."

We didn't hear from Raphi before Rosh Hashanna, which rather surprised us. He always calls to get a Sabbath blessing from his father, and to miss the blessing on the night of the New Year was beyond odd.

Raphi called last night to say he went to take a shower to get ready for the holidays, and when he walked back to his

room he found his roommates had left and locked him out by mistake. He got someone to call the campus police to let him in, but by the time the cop showed up it was close to sundown.

"The officer lectured me on never leaving my room without my keys," Raphi said, "and to never trust my roommates. He said I can only depend on myself in these situations and not to count on anyone else. I wanted to tell him he must have a very sad life with that philosophy, but he had the master key and I was standing there wearing only a towel, so I kept it to myself."

College. Truly a learning experience.

Raphi did ask me about what classes to take, what to major and minor in, and my advice was to take whatever interested him and as much of it as he felt comfortable taking.

"Essentially, Brandeis is *paying you* to go to school there," I said. "We're paying room and board, and yes, that is much pricier than if you'd gone to UF, but they're paying tuition. Take advantage of it."

He sent me a paper he'd written for his freshman seminar, a paper on fatalism vs. determinism, the kind of stuff undergrads and their professors find fascinating. It was a good paper, and I contributed my part by sharing some jokes that I thought fit the concept, so I'll be

interested in seeing what comes of it.

Micah is working hard at banjo and noodling around with an acoustic guitar. Guitar lessons are tied to the first grade reports, but based on what I've seen so far I'm optimistic that we'll see the A-B average I'm demanding before I shell out for more lessons. We also hired a math tutor since Micah insisted on being bumped up to Honors Algebra II when his teachers recommended him for regular Algebra II. Since he's pulling in test scores in the 80-100 range, I have to agree with Micah's assessment that he's capable of doing the tougher work, he just needed a little extra help.

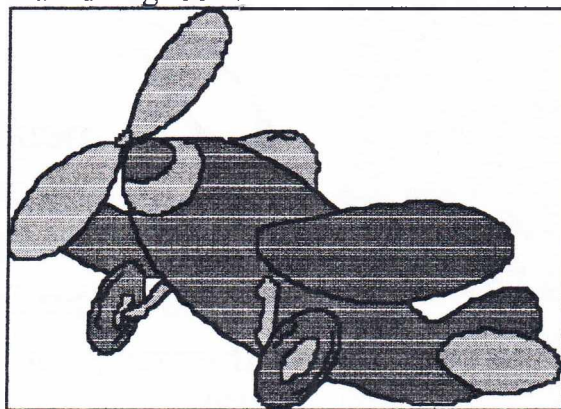
## CONJOSE

For a WorldCon where I had very few assigned duties, I sure seemed to be running around a lot at ConJose. But I enjoyed myself and had a wonderful time, marred only by the news of the death of Janice's ex, Neil Weiss. We knew it was coming, but it didn't make it any easier to deal with when it happened.

When I arrived Thursday Janice took me to lunch at a tasty omelette shop which may have offered the only opportunity to get grits in Northern California. But since I can get excellent grits back home, I passed and opted for a build-my-own omelette, potatoes and plenty of coffee. My body was telling me it was long past lunch and I knew it would be an even longer day ahead, so it seemed a good opportunity to stoke up.

Janice also presented me with a new replacement boomerang for Micah, purchased on her summer trip, and some souvenirs of her vacation for me including a lovely shell inlaid brooch. We talked and relaxed a bit knowing we had some hectic times ahead over the weekend.

Our hotel was the Hyatt Sante Claire, a historic building now restored. It was an excellent choice, midway between the Convention Center and the Fairmont, the main hotel for the convention, yet quiet and soothing since all the parties were at the Fairmont. It also offered a tasty Italian bakery for breakfast and good food in their main dining room.



I went to register and found the first convention snafu (at least for me and others). The badges weren't all done and the pocket programs weren't ready. Mind you, I was number 117 so it's not like they didn't know I was attending, but the printer was behind and they were having to print badges by hand. On the other hand, the names were large enough to read, which was a huge improvement over Philly.

ConJose offered an interesting variation on the name tag. While I would have preferred a tag I could clip to my shirt, they had neck pouches that held your nametag in the front. Many conventioners said the pouches were handy for holding room keys, pocket programs, etc., but I didn't get much use out of mine. Turns out the *pouch* was the main ticket--if it got lost it was a considerable fee to replace it, ConJose feeling the pouch was more difficult to duplicate than the ticket.

I did enjoy this year's dealer room. There had been some concern at Philly that dealers' rooms were going the way of the dinosaur, since many hard-to-find books

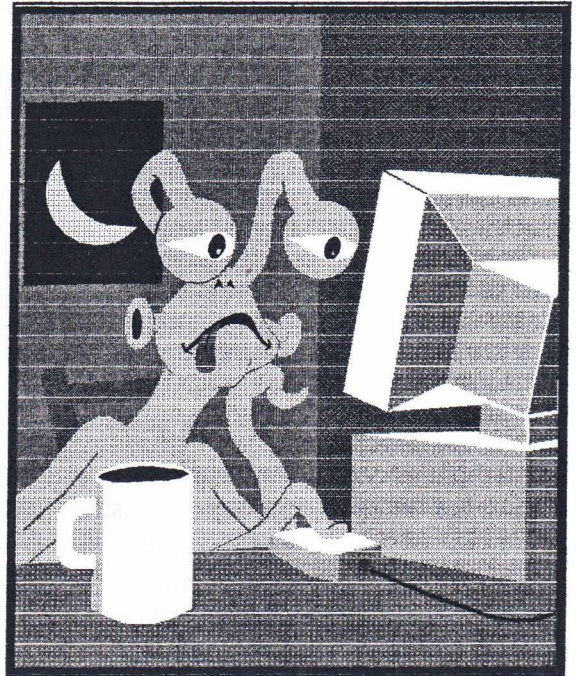


and other fannish items could now be located on line. What did we need dealers for? But I found the variety and quality of merchandise offered at ConJose made this dealer room every bit as enjoyable as past dealer rooms had been. I got bumper stickers and buttons for Raphi ("Sleeps Well With Others" and my favorite, "A quality university needs a football team like a fish needs a bicycle.") and a t-shirt for Micah. Janice got the shirt I wanted, one that said "Success means never having to wear a suit", but since it only came in 2X at the Con I couldn't complain.

I signed up for a Green Room shift and arranged to meet the TorCon Green Room manager to discuss his plans. After unpacking I set up my laptop in our hotel room and found it very user unfriendly, considering we were in the heart of the tech universe. The hotel room phone didn't have a data port. To access a phone line I had to crawl under the desk, disconnect the phone and plug into a hard to reach jack. I also used my cell phone to call home. I hate carrying a cell, but there are times where it is handy, especially if the only people who have the number are your immediate family.

One of the advantages of having ConJose where it was, at least for me, was Janice knowing the local restaurant scene. We ignored the self congratulatory and glossy con restaurant guide (did we need information on restaurants in NYC?) and used out native guide.

Thursday night we walked to a charming Art Deco hotel and ate in their Italian restaurant where the food was first class, including one of the best tiramisus I'd ever tasted. I even managed to stay up past one a.m., a considerable feat since my body was still on Eastern time.



The next morning I hit the exercise room and found it sadly lacking, but managed to get in a few minutes of treadmill time. We were staying on the fifth floor of the hotel and my trips up and down the stairs helped make up for the lack of regular workouts.

Speaking of sadly lacking, the Green Room was a disappointment after what we'd managed to do in Philadelphia. ConJose's Green Room only offered coffee and tea, no food, no other beverages. This changed by Sunday, but for the first three days there wasn't much for the program participants. I did arrange a meeting there with Steve Lopata, SF fan, staff research person for Compuserve's LitForum and speaker-to-large-kitties. Steve had promised to bring his book on pepperbox guns so I could do some research for my work in progress.



The rest of the day I spent checking out some program items, bid tables, the usual fannish stuff. The parties at the Fairmont were well run, though the elevators weren't up to the task and I felt sorry for the regular hotel guests. I always wonder if they realize what they're getting into when the fans come to town.

Sunday was the Hugos. I'd volunteered to help out at the pre-Hugo reception and was very glad I'd opted for comfortable shoes over high heels. Especially when I got drafted to help out during the Hugo ceremonies, directing presenters to their spot backstage. I didn't know many of the presenters by sight and was at a considerable disadvantage, but I gave it my best shot, along with Janice, and we managed to pull it off with few hitches. Overall it was one of the better Hugo ceremonies I'd attended in terms of things not going wrong, but the ventilation system at the auditorium wasn't up to that many warm bodies and it was quite warm.

That was one thing I didn't adequately plan for--I remembered ConFrancisco as being chilly and figured ConJose would be similar, but the days were unusually warm. On Saturday I walked around the street fair near the Convention center and it felt like it was in the 90's--more like Gainesville than San Jose. We didn't get any rain though, so it could have been much worse.

The programming I saw I enjoyed, and the bid parties were fun, but the

highlight of the convention was watching a bid being born. We woke up Sunday morning to learn that shortly after we'd left a party the night before, people came in and started throwing \$20 bills at Aussie fan Stephen Boucher, and it wasn't because they wanted him to take his clothes off.

No, they wanted him to start a Melbourne in 2010 bid.

It was like watching the birth of a star, or the Big Bang. By the next day there was over \$4,000 in the account. People couldn't pull out their wallets fast enough. Old "UK in '05" registration forms were scratched through to be used for Australia and there were *t-shirts*. By the dead dog parties Monday night the bid was in full swing. Truly an amazing sight.

Of course, I don't know how the folks back home in Oz feel about all this, but I'm pre-supporting it!

The other highlight of the con was Janice's Fannish anniversary party, celebrating 25 years in fandom and 20 worldcons. Monday morning we ran errands to get party supplies, including an absolutely luscious mocha sheet cake from a local bakery. We also stopped at a grocery that seemed the kind of place you'd find in Yuppie heaven--lots of precooked, exotic take-out, strange out of season fruits and vegetables lovingly arranged, 80 different types of extra virgin olive oil, that sort of thing. The kind of place where you'd be embarrassed to just pop in for a quart of 2% and a pack of smokes.

The party theme was afternoon tea, and there was that, along with lemonade (thank ghu we bought lemonade!) that was a real hit as the mercury pushed 95F. There were little sandwiches, fruit, cocoa, and the cake, with the CFG allowing Janice to rent their room for the event. We were concerned the space would be less than adequate, but as I reminded Janice, in all the Regency novels we read a party's not a



success unless it's a total crush.

The party was a great fun and I'm glad I could be there to share in Janice's celebration.

We finished the night with supper in the Italian restaurant at our hotel, one of the few places open on Labor Day. Later were the Dead Dog parties with more money being thrown at Australia, good food and liquor and of course, a rehashing of ConJose.

Speaking of ConJose, I have to take a moment to dis the airport. The San Jose airport is without a doubt the worst I've flown out of in years. For example, once you were through the security check *there were no restrooms*. If you had to go during your one hour wait on your flight, you had to go back out into the terminal. The chairs were the kind of hard plastic found in the food stamp office, the areas were all overcrowded, there wasn't a working PA system so the Delta agents would try to make announcements and no one could hear them...you get the idea. It may have been more convenient than SFO in terms of distance, but not in terms of comfort.

Other than that though, I'd have to pronounce ConJose a success, at least at the personal level. I'm looking forward to TorCon and Boston, and then back the UK in '05!

## BOOKS!

### THE NIGHT WE MET--ROB

BYRNES--Andrew Westlake is in love.

Being gay and in love in a heartless city like New York is bad enough. Being gay and in love with Frank DiBenedetto, straight scion of a Mafia don, is a one way ticket to a landfill in New Jersey.

But Andrew *believes* in true love, and the rollicking tale of Andrew and Frank in *THE NIGHT WE MET* will have readers of all sexual orientations laughing and

cheering our intrepid hero on. Andrew is the first to admit, and his friends are quick to remind him, that he has a tendency to love unwisely. But never as unwisely as this. Andrew's pursuit of Frank ends up involving the FBI, the Mafia, the NYPD, the New York publishing establishment, habitués of the gay nightclub scene and vindictive ex-lovers.

Byrnes' novel is peppered with the flavor of New York, showing the city in all its splendor and squalor. He has a deft touch with characterization--the secondary players practically leap off the page as they complicate Andrew and Frank's relationship, and all come to life in Andrew's orbit as he careens through Manhattan and points west in pursuit of love.

*THE NIGHT WE MET* is a laugh out loud romp that should appeal to all romance lovers. Will Andrew be able to keep his heart (and other body parts) intact? Is there any future for him with a straight mafioso? It's different, it's sassy, and it's fun, a tale of how true love can catch us by surprise, but it's still love, after all.

### THE EYRE AFFAIR--JASON FFORDE--

Another highly recommended book I finally got around to picking up, and was glad I did. I couldn't laugh enough. It's sfnal in that there's an alternate, Pythonesque universe where literature is real and characters can be stolen, altering the reality of the reading public. The Literary Detectives ride herd on the classics, keeping them from disappearing or being altered. And when Jane Eyre is kidnaped right out of her eponymous novel, it's up to LitDet. Thursday Next to save the day.

The most hysterical scene is Shakespeare's "Richard III" done as "Rocky Horror Picture Show", but the

missionary Baconians take a close second for laughs registered.



## LIRAEI, SABRIEL--GARTH

NIX--A Young Adult series

recommended by Janice, and one that I enjoyed. There wasn't a lot of ground breaking material, except for the idea of a "muggles" world sharing a border with an Old Kingdom full of magic and walking dead. The non-magical world of the southern lands is at the level of WWI England, and society reflects the attitudes and scientific achievements of that time. But the closer one gets to the border, the more magic "leaks" over and young Sabriel finds herself having to leave school and prepare for her life as the Abhorsen, one capable of sending the Dead back into their own world. It's a typical coming-of-age story, but well done for all that.

LIRAEI picks up a generation later as Sabriel's children prepare to take their place in the Old Kingdom and a young woman of mysterious parentage named Lirael has to set out on her own voyage of discovery. Her big secret is pretty easy to determine by the middle of the book, but

again, it's a well done coming of age story.////###

## HARDCASE, HARDFREEZE--DAN

SIMMONS--Continuing our excursions into the wonderful world of *noir* fiction we find two new books by SF/Horror/Mystery writer Dan Simmons. In *HARDCASE* Simmons introduces an ex-con, ex-PI living on the mean streets of Buffalo, NY.

I can't find my notes on the books to give you the protagonist's name, but I did enjoy them and am looking forward to more of the same from Simmons. The stories begin with the protagonist going to prison after he tracks down the sludge who killed his (female) partner. After obtaining a confession he drops the bad guy out of a window...onto a police car four stories down.

Once he's out the PI pulls in a marker earned in prison by watching over the son of a Mafia don and making sure the kid doesn't become someone's new shower toy. The Mafioso hires him to investigate goings on in the family business, and the story takes off from there. Real hard boiled material here, not for the faint of heart. If you've read Simmons horror fiction you have an idea of what to expect.

## MAILING COMMENTS! FOR SFPA 228--

WEISSKOPF--I enjoyed the Baen party at ConJose, but it just wasn't the same without you.//The National Guardsmen didn't have ammo? Really? What's the point? Kind of reminds me of the eyerolling city commission meeting where well intentioned (but dumb) citizens said the cops should have a "shoot to wound" policy. The Chief sighed and tried



to explain that if an officer's weapon is drawn, it's drawn with deadly intent. They're not the Lone Ranger, shooting guns out of people's hands.////##

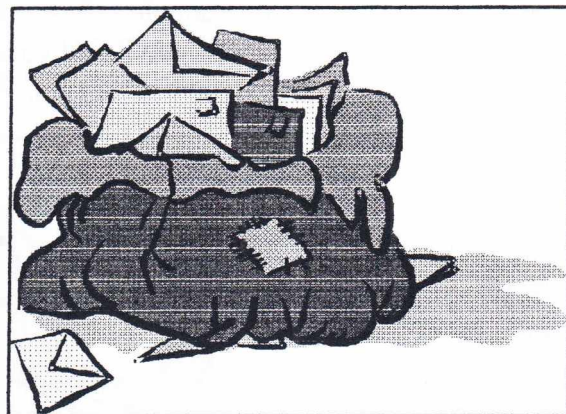
**ONE SHOT**--Does Randy get good FM reception with those antennae? Nice job, gang.////##

**DENGROVE**--ct. Lillian re: **CLONES**: My favorite comment to date is Connie Willis at WorldCon, repeating some of the beyond wooden dialogue between Annakin and the princess and pausing to ask plaintively, "Hasn't George Lucas ever been on a date?" ////##

**FELLER**--Pretty scary stuff about the eye problems. Here's hoping you and Anita can avoid car wrecks, diseases and strange swimming pools in the coming year.////##

**COPELAND, J**--I read King's **ON WRITING** and got a lot out of it, but it isn't a book I'll keep coming back to like **BIRD BY BIRD**, Anne Lamott's treatise on the writing life. On the other hand, I still very much enjoy King's short fiction. It's been ages since I read one of his novels, but his shorter pieces still make me go "Wow, how'd he do that?"

I sometimes feel like I'm not a real writer because I don't feel compelled to write every single day no matter what, but I have gotten into the habit of always carrying a writing implement and paper with me in case I get a random thought I wish to preserve. This is especially helpful when I'm stopped at red lights or walking the dog, because I find that like that block of time when I'm in the shower, the "brain in neutral" period is a very creative one. Things surface that otherwise would stay buried while I'm doing real work.//



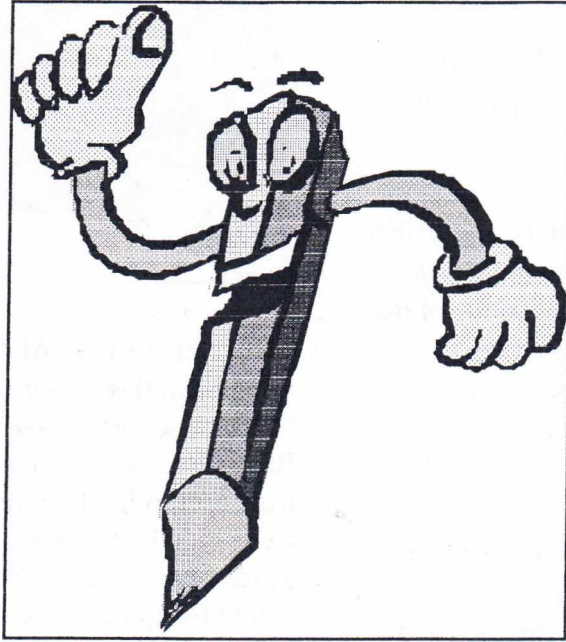
ct. Guy re: **Alzheimer's**--Howard and I have this on-going argument about "heroic measures"--he wants 'em, I don't. But as long as we have Living Wills and trust each other holding power of attorney, we should be OK provided we're not banged up in a common disaster. Then it would be up to Raphi and Micah to study the documents and try and figure out what's what. I've tried to have this conversation with the boys a couple times, especially since Raphi turned 18, but they're not ready to discuss our fates yet and I'm not willing to push it. ////##

**WEBER**--ct. Me: I agree, "fairportfan" gave a thoughtful, incisive review of **DEMOLITION ANGEL**. And I loved **L.A. REQUIEM**. I can hardly wait until the next book.////##

**GELB**--Reading your trip report made me wish I was there again. And you ate pastries on Acland Street! And kosher lamb! How could you bear to come back to the US after that? Oh, and will you send me your Anzac biscuit recipe? I very much enjoyed the SatireWire article. Thanks for sharing!////##

**LARSON**--Dang, girl, I get exhausted reading your 'zines! It may comfort you to know that some things do get easier as the

kids get older. They put themselves to bed, for example. Heck, after they reach high school you'll find yourself going to bed long before they do. Hang in there.////###



**ROBE--**So you discovered Bela Fleck? In our banjo playing household, Bela is Ghod. I've seen him three times in concert, twice with the Flecktones and once with Edgar Meyer. Micah was with me for the last two and we had incredible seats and a musical experience not to be forgotten. When Micah seems discouraged because he's not as good as he wants to be (yet), I remind him that Bela started playing as a teenager too.////###

**COPELAND, L--**My sincere condolences on the deaths in your family, and I feel your horror at being on the receiving end of the phone call every parent dreads. I find myself fretting over Raphi far away in Boston, and I have a lot more sympathy for my mother-in-law who still worries over her baby. Some things just don't change.//Great cartoons, especially "Over the Hedge". I wish we had that in

the local paper!//

Don't give up on James just 'cause he's been sucked into the black hole of gaming. Micah (15) actually picked up a book for leisure reading last month, **FIGHT CLUB**. I read it also so we could talk about it. It's way cool being able to share books with nearly grown kids. Raphi read **AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER AND CLAY** this summer on my recommendation and pronounced it one of the best books he'd read all year, and Micah wants to get more books by the author of **FIGHT CLUB**.

## END MAILING COMMENTS!

I had an agent ask me for a synopsis of my WIP a while back, and it put me in the interesting position of having to figure out an ending to the book in its formative stages, rather than figuring what happens as I'm writing it. A new experience for me, but an oddly liberating one as well. I took my "notes" file where I write snippets of dialogue and scenes as they come to me, and cut and pasted it into the synopsis, and lo and behold, I had a document to work from that made a whole bunch of narrative sense.

I reminded myself as I was writing the synopsis that nothing's carved in stone--if I find a scene's not working as I outlined it, I can always change it. I think this is what scared me about writing from an outline or synopsis in the past--the idea that it would be difficult to tweak it once I had it in black and white saying "and then *this* happens..."

I'm finding this isn't a problem, and if anything the synopsis soothes me 'cause I don't have to wonder what happens next, I have a template to work from.

'TIL NEXT DISTY,  
EVE