

GUILTY PLEASURES 27

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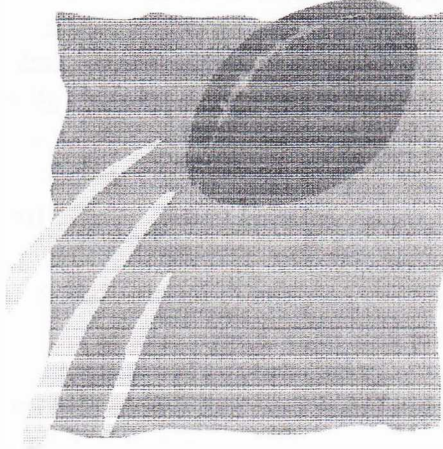
If it's Xmas time, it must be time for bowl games. Or at least that's the way it seems around here. This year we had the additional pleasure of hosting Janice Gelb over New Year's. Having Janice here was wonderful, having the Gators suffer an ignominious defeat as Michigan rolled over us in a bowl game was not.

But it was still a pleasant break. Raphi returned at the beginning of December and turned into a bat, sleeping all day and up all night. He received his International Baccalaureate diploma in a ceremony that was rather like a class reunion for these kids as they caught up on what had been happening with their college careers. The schools they scattered to ranged from the CIA (Culinary Institute of America) to the local community college to Harvard, but all were in fine form that evening. I was surprised by the number of IB students who didn't qualify for the diploma but was told Raphi's class had a record number receive it, so it must have been harder to get it than even I suspected. I do know Raphi turned down a chance to study in Israel during his junior year because it would have cost him the IB diploma so I'm glad he

received his due.

Micah worked in Howard's office part of break but his schedule too was mostly sleep all day, play on the computer all night. Not atypical for kids that age. Yofi was glad to have both of them home so there was always a warm bed with a human in it.

I'd forgotten what it was like to have another teenage boy in the house and it made a noticeable impact on my spending and grocery shopping habits as the weeks wore on. For instance, Raphi wanted more "dairy" dishes because at Brandeis most of his meals are "meat", since kosher dining requires separating milk and meat dishes and it's usually easier to cook meat for large crowds. So when he got home he wanted his old favorites, veggie tacos, rice and beans, pasta dishes, etc. On the other hand, Micah's a



carnivore so meat's what's been for supper most nights since Raphi left and it took some thinking to get back into old habits.

I did draw the line at extra laundry duties. I told Raphi if his clothes were in the hamper they'd get washed with the rest of the family's, but if he wanted more than that he could bloody well do it himself, and he did.

The boys went out to a lot of movies and Raphi caught up on reading for pleasure, a luxury he'd forgone at college. I remember that sacrifice well from my undergraduate days. There was so much required reading that picking up a novel seemed positively sinful.

Janice brightened up our holidays by meeting us in Tampa on a New Year's Eve marred by record rains and flooding. We'd planned to go to Ybor City, the trendy "arts" district to watch the New Year's Celebration, but after a nice meal at a fancy restaurant Howard liked we opted instead for a quiet evening at our hotel. We'd gotten a two room suite at Residence Inn, giving us plenty of room for five people. Janice and I gossiped so much, to the delight of the boys who *never* hear me gossip, that we're both sure we're going to burn in Gehenna for

years. Talk about your guilty pleasures!

The next day was absolutely beautiful, picture perfect for a Florida bowl game. Howard, Janice, Raphi and Micah left for the game accompanied by Howard's cousin Jan and her husband Eric. I spent some time reading then wandered over to an upscale mall across from the hotel. They didn't have the one thing I was looking for, my perfume, but I enjoyed seeing the shops favored by the people with money to spend on Chanel bags and Prada shoes. I bought a couple candles for the house at L'Occitane, some undies at Nordstrom's, and that was it.

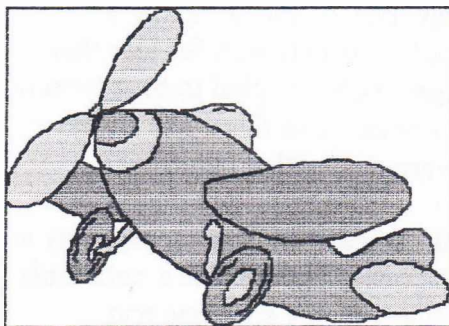
After the game we hit the road for the drive back to Gainesville, stopping at a Chili's restaurant to fuel the boys. Janice and I drove in her rental and both cars made good time, getting back so Howard could watch some more bowl games.

Thursday was Janice's day for Gator shopping and we met up in the afternoon. I'd originally planned to take her to the Harn Museum, an addition to the town since she'd left school, but I also wanted to work on a website for Darlenemarshall.com and she was more than willing to oblige, even if it meant cursing Windows and Bill Gates every 15 minutes. At least we had a high speed cable connection. I can't imagine how awful it would have been on my 28.8 phone line.

We also paid a visit to my

hairdresser and Janice came away with a stunningly beautiful 'do, if I do say so. Very chic and stylish.

Saturday night we had an extra ticket to our season subscription at the local performing arts center and Audra MacDonald was the performer, singing torch songs and



showtunes, her specialty, and then it was back to California for Ms. Gelb and back to school for Micah.

Later that week we were joined by Rafi Lehmann, family friend and son of our former rabbi. Rafi is a student at Goucher College in Maryland, but he's spending this year studying at Hebrew University in Israel. Rafi left the Hebrew U. cafeteria ten minutes before the terrorist attack in the Fall, only a couple days after he arrived.

Despite that, he said life goes on in Israel and they have the same activities and life that they've always had, the difference being the lack of tourists.

Micah wants to study in Israel next year and we've told him it's up to him, but part of it will

depend on the situation at that time. Right now we're optimistic.

Instead of enrolling in Camp Ramah where Micah usually spends his summers (and where Raphi is now a counselor), Micah opted to enroll in a special Jewish youth group outdoors program, six weeks of camping and hiking. It sounded tailor made for him and I'm looking forward to his having a super summer. Even better, Raphi will be *paid* to go to camp instead of it being a drain on our finances.

The Writing Business--

At this point there's not much of a business, but there's still writing. And my on line writer's group on Compuserve does encourage me to keep going. SMUGGLER'S GOLD is 1/3 done and an agent asked to look at the full manuscript of CAPTAIN SINISTER, so I keep inching forward.

I thought about attending the RWA conference in NYC this year, but it's in July and my checking account can't take a major hit like that followed by WorldCon a month later. It was tough--hang out with romance writers, or go to Worldcon--OK, it wasn't tough at all.

I was listening to some music coming from Raphi's room, stopped to enjoy it and said to him, "I like that. It sounds like good

writing music."

So he burned me a CD of the Trans Siberian Orchestra and labeled it "Pirated tracks for a pirate loving porn writer...my mom."

Now if only he'd take the snake back to Boston...

Book

Reviews

THE PESHAWAR LANCERS--S.M.

STIRLING--Q: Do you like Kipling?

A: I don't know, I've never Kippled.

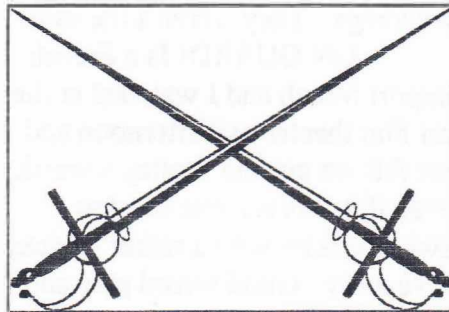
OK, now that that's out of the way, I *have* kippled, er, read Kipling and if you're a fan of Kipling or other books about the glory days of the Raj and the Great Game, you'll enjoy the alternate history in THE PESHAWAR LANCERS.

In the 1850's a series of heavenly objects strike the Northern Hemisphere, disrupting weather patterns and wreaking destructive havoc on the scale of a nuclear attack. After three years of winter PM Benjamin Disraeli puts a bold plan into effect, an Exodus of English families to India, South Africa and Australia to create a new home for the

Empire.

It works, and by the year 2025 the English have reestablished a new empire, based in India and melding Indian and British culture. Now the Russians, who survived largely though a cult of cannibalism, are eyeing the Northwest Frontier. They could even bring about the end of the world if they're not halted.

THE PESHAWAR LANCERS is good, rousing adventure with cunning spies, faithful native guides, thuggees, ninjas(!), beautiful maidens in distress, smart girls who get themselves out of trouble, romance, intrigue, battles, pageantry and more. I highly recommend it.///



March to the Stars--Ringo & Weber--

In this the third novel about Prince Roger and his Bronze Barbarians the action shifts as the space Marines, true to their historic roots, come face to face with fighting at sea for the first time.

And of course, they do stunningly well.

Pirates, sea monsters, palace intrigue and alien romance abound in this latest installment of Prince Roger's quest to make it to the Marduk spaceport where he can steal a ship to carry him home. To my disappointment, this wasn't the final installment of the story, but Ringo and Weber have me hooked deeply enough that I want to see where the story goes next.///

Bone of Contention--

Roberta Gellis--The bad news is Gellis said in a listserv group that her publisher hasn't contracted for more of these books. The good news is the latest adventure of Magdalene la Batarde, medieval whoremistress and girlfriend to Sir Bellamy of Itchen has enough adventure and guessing to keep the reader satisfied, at least for now.

Magdalene is called to Oxford by her overlord, William of Ypres, and Sir Bell is gnashing his teeth over this latest reminder that Magdalene is her own mistress, but on occasion is also William's bedwarmer. But Magdalene doesn't have time to deal with Bell's wounded male pride because she's got to work behind the scenes to gather information for William and tiptoe through the political turmoil of King Stephen's court.

A well done mystery with characters that keep you wondering who's responsible for a series of deaths that to Magdalene's eye appear all too connected.

I hope Gellis will have better luck selling these books, perhaps to another publisher more interested in the small, but loyal fanbase she's building here.///

Elizabeth George, asst. Mysteries--

I mention these because I'd never read the Thomas Lynley mysteries by Elizabeth George, and once I started I was hooked. Fortunately our library had a full set so I'm plowing my way through them. And Janice gave me a copy of Dorothy Sayers short stories so they'll keep me company when I want to read about a different member of the British aristocracy who solves mysteries.///###



A few movies...

We liked THE GANGS OF NEW YORK but we loved CATCH ME IF YOU CAN. Finally, a movie

where Leonardo DiCaprio is acting instead of just looking pretty! And Daniel Day Lewis should be thrown in jail for stealing GANGS OF NEW YORK. Was there anyone else in that movie? Hard to tell, 'cause every time he was on screen that's all we saw.

MONSOON WEDDING was good fun, and seeing it close on the heels of MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING we all agreed that it doesn't matter, if you belong to a big, ethnic family it's all the same wedding. We howled at MBFGW. Change the accents and it's every

Italian/Polish/Jewish/Mexican/ethnic wedding celebration held in the US. I've attended a couple Southern Baptist and Episcopalian weddings. They weren't the same.

ON GUARD! Is a French import Micah and I watched at the art film theater one afternoon and we felt we got our money's worth, even if it was an over-the-top swashbuckler with a rather squicky love story. Good sword play and stunts though.

THE TWO TOWERS. Loved it, but my bladder may never forgive me for hanging in there until the bitter end.

HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS. I'm sorry Daniel Radcliffe and the kiddies are outgrowing their roles. I think they're very well cast and I'm going to miss them in later movies. This one was dark enough to scare the bejesus out of little kids, not necessarily a bad thing, mind, and it continues to do

the franchise proud.

BARBERSHOP. It may be hubris for a little ol' white chick like me to have an opinion on this movie, but I thought it was wonderful. Very affirming and true in its depiction of what it means to be part of the community. Howard didn't like it 'cause he only saw the negative aspects of it, but I thought it was well done. Good was rewarded, evil was punished, people were shown caring about family, friends, jobs and home.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES--PBS--a new Masterpiece Theater production, with one of the best Watsons I've ever seen. Not a buffoon, but a true colleague and the guy who did Holmes was good too, though Richard E. Grant as the bad guy stole the show. Excellent production.

I noticed THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES with Ian Holm (Bilbo Baggins) is out on tape. If you haven't seen this charming little film, treat yourself. It's delightful.///###

Mailing Comments, SFPA 230

Feller--Mazel Tov on the housebuilding plans. Maybe I

shouldn't mention a homebuilder told me once that next to adultery, building a home together is the leading cause of divorce? Establish early who makes the final decisions, and good luck!////###

DUFF bid--I voted! Good luck!

Markstein--Ct. Me: In a way, one of the advantages of writing romance is you always know the ending. The hero and heroine are going to be together at the end. Perhaps that takes some of the pressure off me as a writer, since I know where they're going, I can concentrate on how they're going to get there, which is really what romance is all about--the journey more than the destination.////###

Copeland, J--I'm sorry to hear about Liz's kidney stone problems. Were non-surgical techniques not an option because of the size? I understand there are some machines now that use sound waves to break up stones.// Your Zappa quote (and let me ramble on, again, about how much I like your quote collections, in fact, I leave them in the boys' bathroom so Raphi and Micah can have some quality reading time and lately my favorite is the Mark Twain one on the use of the word "very" in manuscripts, but I digress....) hits the nail on the head. So sayeth the

woman who lives in a state where the constitution bans confining pregnant pigs in boxes.//

Your backcover cartoon was all too sad and accurate. One of the better lines on *Will & Grace* this year was Karen saying "Last time I had a date Bush was president and we were about to bomb Iraq."////###



Hughes, S.--I agree, the Georgia State Flag looks like it was (poorly) designed by a committee.//Thanks for the ornament, such a timely offering! I don't think I had a single Xmas ornament on hand for the holidays! Seriously, it was a thoughtful and cute gesture.////###

Brown--Your "Death Totals for Page Placement" is the kind of humor I miss because I'm not working in a newsroom anymore. Thanks for sharing, you sick puppy.////###

Weisskopf--Your trip to NYC makes me want to head off to the Big Apple again as soon

as it warms up. As an aside, there was a popular item in Minnesota about 20 years back, shirts that featured a red apple with snow on top and it said "The Minne-Apple". ////###

Hughes, S--I agree with you about writing being a full time job if you're serious about it. I tried writing PIRATE'S PRICE when I was working other jobs but I couldn't get it finished until I worked on it full time. I have tons of admiration for people who write and hold down a day job, but I know I'm not one of them.////###

Copeland, L--OK, you answered my question about the sonic treatments. Sounds like a bummer--painful and you have the dreaded anticipation of the second round of surgery. I hope at least this allows you some down time to catch up on rest and reading, or even watching bad TV. And I agree with you, you're fortunate the problem was caught before it became even worse. Was there anything in your urinary functioning that led you to see the doctor? I'm not trying to pry for squicky details so much as know if there's anything one should look for or be aware of. Take care!////###

'Bye! Eve