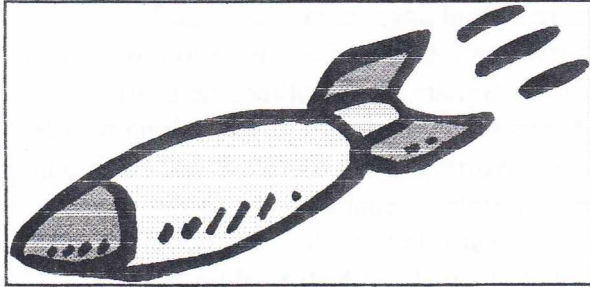

GUILTY PLEASURES 28

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So we're at war, again. I don't know what the situation is going to be by the time you read this, I only know what it is at the time I type it. I have to admit, I'm ambivalent. Some people whose opinions I respect, and I don't mean George Bush and his gang, feel strongly that Saddam Hussein is a threat to the world and must be stopped. Israel's preemptive strike against Iraq's nuclear plant in the 80's was a wake up call. Since then, aside from all the atrocities he's committed against his own people and the Kurds, Hussein has given no indication (as Mohammar Qadaffi has) that he's interested in scaling back his threats of aggression. I used to listen to left wing radio on Pacifica Network and NPR about how it's the US's fault that Iraqi children are starving because of the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the war. Bad as I feel for the ordinary Iraqis, it's not the US's fault if the ruling regime chooses guns over butter for its people. And it has.

It is clear from the early days of the war though that rather than see the American and British forces as liberators, a lot of common Iraqis are seeing them as invaders. Go figure. Foreign army shows up on your

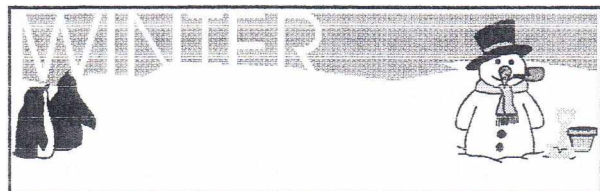
soil and drops bombs on your head and you have a hard time embracing the concept. I can understand that. We saw it happen in Viet Nam too. So as I said, I'm ambivalent, but I can put a personal face on the war.

Lance Corporal Adam Brown, USMC, is a young man I watched grow up. He lived next door to us and was the kind of Southern gentleman who would leap to his feet when an adult entered the room, and the sentences all ended "yes, ma'am" and "yes, sir." Our boys got pretty darn tired of hearing how well mannered Adam was compared to some youngsters we knew. Adam used to babysit for us, and Micah especially enjoyed Adam coming over 'cause he was a big kid (6'4") who would play basketball and do other "guy" things, unlike some of the young ladies who babysat. A good student, active in his church, headed for college at UF, Adam stunned his parents when he told them he was going to enlist in the Marines.

They supported his decision, even though they really didn't understand it, and the entire neighborhood was proud of Adam. I had a chance to see him one more time in his Class A's and he looked like a recruiting poster for the Marines. As I said to Howard, "I hope the Corps realizes how fortunate they are to have a young man of that caliber choose them."

Today Adam is somewhere in Iraq. I've been writing to him since he got posted to Kuwait, and while he hasn't been able to write back, I know he enjoys getting letters telling him about the azaleas blooming, and

what's new in Gainesville, and how the neighborhood is doing. And I remember him in my prayers.



Blizzard rocks Beantown!

Y'wanna know the best part about going to Boston in mid-February? Knowing that when I'm all done, I'm flying back to Florida.

Despite that, Boskone 40 (and SnowCon(e)) was a lot of fun and I'm glad I went.

I arrived in Boston on Valentine's Day to a sunny high of 6°F but I'd brought the right clothes so it wasn't too bad. The Boston Sheraton, which will be the major hotel at Noreascon 4, was everything one expects from a high end downtown hotel catering to the convention crowd. Comfortable rooms with delightful down comforters on the beds added to the ambience.

I settled in and phoned home to find my poor Yofi had been throwing up, necessitating a trip to the vet's and a battery of tests that determined she'd eaten something she shouldn't have. When Howard asked the vet why she would do that he looked at Howard and said, "I hate to be the one to break this to you, but she's a dog. That means she's dumber than a brick when it comes to what she's willing to eat."

But by the weekend Yofi was back in fine fettle and my hat's off to Howard for taking care of her in this crisis and cleaning up all the messes.

I touched base with Raphi and my niece Leslie Ackerman, then drifted out to the Con with Janice, who'd been working out in the boondocks and experience the joys of Boston traffic from behind the wheel. We made plans to go to Legal Seafoods for supper, because even though it was Valentine's Day and there would be a wait there were two within the confines of the maze of buildings connected together downtown. One in the Pru Center and one in Copley Square on the other side of the Marriott. As predicted, it was a long wait but it was worth it when there's Legal Seafoods fish chowder available.

Saturday was for programming and I attended panels on historical fiction, exposition, future Worldcons and writing more vividly. Janice told me Boskone featured quality programming and I was suitably impressed. I got a lot of useful information from the panels. So much information that I wrote an article for my RWA chapter, proof I really was working! Take that, Ms. IRS auditor!

I was invited on a dinner excursion and thought I heard Janice say "but we'll have to walk over there and it's a topless bar outside."

"Now *that's* entertainment!" I said, "A topless bar, outdoors in this weather!"

"Not a *topless* bar, a *tapas* bar!"

A disappointment, but at least the food was good. The *tapas* (Spanish appetizers/snacks/finger food) bar was on Newbury, a street over from our hotel so we did have to go outside to get there, but it wasn't too bad. The wind was blowing but we were well bundled.

Later there were bid parties sponsored by LA and Kansas City. Something I'd eaten at the *tapas* bar wasn't sitting well with me, but I eventually settled down with a ginger ale and had a great evening.

Sunday was more panels and some

shopping in the dealer's room. I got a "Melbourne in '10" bid shirt, a new Liaden novel from Meisha Merlin, and a pair of tie on devil horns for Micah. I'd picked up items for Raphi earlier in the connected mall, some handy decorative paper storage thingies for the dorm.

My niece called me Sunday afternoon to coordinate getting together for supper. She also told me Raphi's seeing a girl, and dished that Raphi had taken a red rose to the young lady on their first date, and given her a dozen red tulips on Valentine's Day after consulting with Leslie on a VD card that struck just the right note of "I like you but we're not getting in over our heads here, are we?"

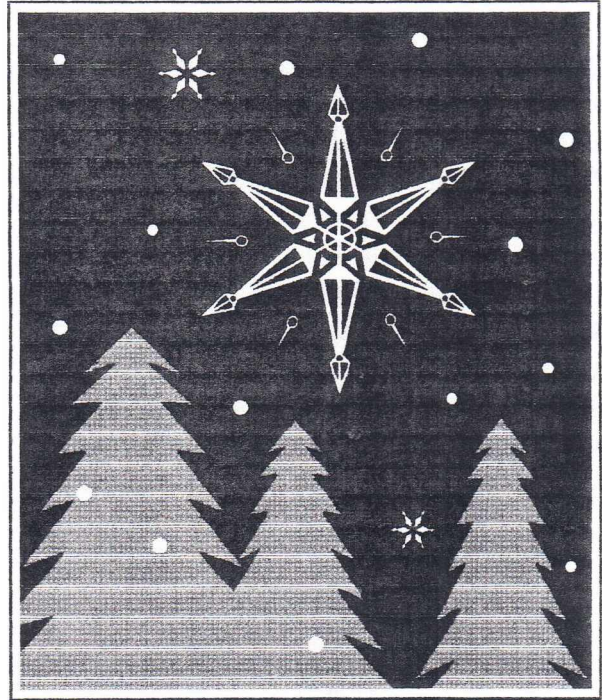
I told Leslie if she kept supplying me with info on the sly there was money in it for her.

They came downtown and we headed over to Marche for supper. Janice had been raving about this restaurant from previous trips to Boston and it was a favorite of Raphi's as well, sort of an upscale cafeteria. You get a card at the entrance and wander through different food stations, picking out what you want and getting your card stamped. One of the nice things about it is the variety of food means there's something for everyone, from carnivores who want slabs of meat to vegetarian specials to Italian dishes to sushi. It also makes for some interesting displays on the plates, and it's easy to overdo but also easy to only eat what you want.

Raphi and Leslie have become much closer than they otherwise would be, living just a few miles apart now. Leslie's family is in Minnesota, my birthplace, and she only saw Raphi on family trips and at "state occasions", bar mitzvahs, weddings, funerals. There was never opportunity to just hang out like she did with her Minnesota cousins. Now they're seeing a lot more of each other, partly because Leslie has a car and takes Raphi

shopping every two weeks or so, and partly because Leslie likes studying in the Brandeis Library. She's in a graduate psych program at Antioch College in New Hampshire and goes to school two days a week, working as a waitress the rest of the time.

Janice joined us for the first part of the meal so she could say "hi" to Raphi, and because her dinner group wasn't going out



until later. It turned out to be a good thing we went early, as Janice told me later that night apparently Marche hadn't planned on either fen or the holiday weekend and ran out of food at many of the stations by the time her group got there.

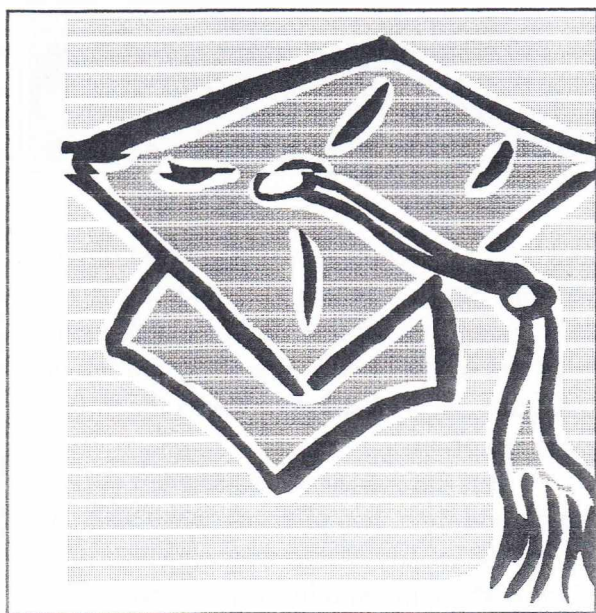
But the Ackerman/Rosenblatt party had a good time, and afterwards we walked around the mostly closed shopping areas, window shopping and in Leslie's case, drooling over the new items in the upscale fashion shops adjoining the Marriott.

All too soon it was time to say goodnight, and Leslie drove Raphi back out to Brandeis. I told Raphi I'd see him in the

morning, my plan being to spend all day Monday with him, have dinner with Raphi and some of his friends, and return to the hotel Monday evening. Little did I know...

Monday morning the TV weather people were saying a storm was on the way, and it was a big'un. I left the hotel under overcast skies and made my way to the T (MBTA) to catch the subway/train out to Brandeis in Waltham. They were running on a Saturday schedule 'cause of President's Day, and like an idiot I didn't check the train schedule first not thinking that the trains don't run as often as the subway. So when I got to Porter Station and had to switch to the commuter train I discovered the next one was two hours off. And it was starting to snow.

Instead I hailed a cab outside the train station and shelled out for a ride to Waltham, which while pricey put me there much more quickly. By the time we arrived at Brandeis it was nearly a whiteout and the weather reports were getting worse. But I met up with Raphi



in time to go to his 10:30 class (Conversational French) and trudged through the snow across campus. It wasn't cold, and that was part of the problem. If the temps had

dropped lower it would have been too cold for snow, but at 25°F it was perfect storm time. The sound of the snow crunching beneath my boots brought back memories, as did the flurries of wet flakes blowing into my eyes.

But we made it to class, I was introduced (*en francais*) to the Professor and got to follow the conversation over the snow (I recognized the word *neige* from cooking) and watch the daily French newscast brought by satellite via a computer downlink that projected the newscast onto the classroom screen.

About 30 minutes into the lesson a TA poked her head in to say the word was going across campus that because of the storm the University was canceling classes and activities for the remainder of the day, and possibly Tuesday.

This put a different complexion on my plans with Raphi. Now I had visions of bunking on the floor of his dorm room, not a pretty sight!

We adjourned to the kosher cafeteria for lunch and to my regret I sampled the beef stew. Raphi, an experienced diner, got the chicken stir fry. We were quickly surrounded by his friends who all wanted to meet "Raphi's mom, the porn writer." Seems Raphi had been out with a bunch of people the first week of class and when they went around the table after being asked to reveal something about themselves that no one knew, Raphi said "My mother writes pornographic novels."

We had a good time, and one of the young ladies innocently said to Raphi, "Will Naomi be stopping by?" I looked blank because he hadn't told me about the putative girlfriend, and I wasn't about to let on that Leslie told me.

So it was quite a shock when later on Raphi said "I know Leslie told you everything."

This was somewhat annoying as I'd hoped to use Leslie for a conduit to get information on the sly, however it's her loss since now I won't be paying her to inform.

And Naomi didn't stop by. Turns out she would have been part of our dinner excursion that evening, along with three or four other student friends, but as the snow came down even faster I told Raphi I'd best look into getting back to town before things shut down. While I wasn't so worried about the T, I wasn't sure if the aboveground train could operate under blizzard conditions. There was a train coming to the Brandeis station, conveniently on campus, at 3 p.m. so I planned to take that one back into town and in the meantime hung out at Sherman dining hall and then briefly at Raphi's dorm.

When it was time to go to the train station Raphi led the way through the snow with me stepping into his footprints as he cleared a path. I caught the train and while I wished I'd been able to spend more time with him, I knew Raphi was coming home in two weeks for the first part of his Spring Break and I'd see him then.

Oh, and Raphi made the Brandeis Dean's List for the Fall semester. I was sorry I missed my chance to meet the mysterious Naomi though.

Back at the hotel things were winding down from Boskone and seguing into "Snowcon(e)" as convention goers who *thought* it was all over suddenly found their stay in Boston extended by canceled flights and trains and impassable highways. But we made do, struggling along with only luxury shops, decent restaurants and an attached 10 theater cineplex to keep us from going stir crazy in the snow. We even braved a dinner excursion Monday night to an Italian restaurant across the street from the motel. It was eerie to see how deserted downtown Boston could be, but the snow covered everything in a white mantle that made even

the grungier buildings look pristine.

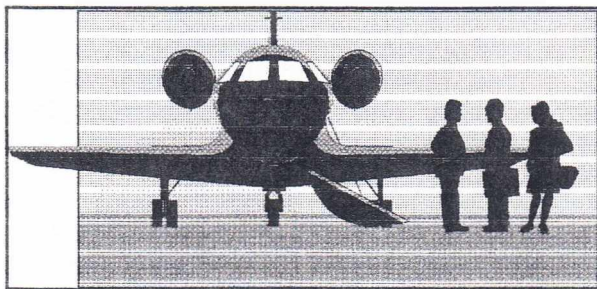
On the other hand, the Marriott had barricades and signs out front to keep people from being brained by chunks of falling ice, so it wasn't a total winter wonderland.

The storm tossed refugees retired to Sharon Sbarsky's hotel room to watch the snow falling outside while commiserating



together about what hell it was being trapped inside this luxury hotel with only single malts and imported beer to get us through this trauma.

We also talked about programming for the first "Snowcon(e)". Notes were taken, and I hope Janice will mention where they're posted, but I recall Vanilla Ice was the musical guest, the Barnes and Noble in the attached mall was our dealer's room and George R.R. Martin must have gotten really fed up with hearing people say, "Winter is coming"? Hell, winter is friggin' *here!*"



On Tuesday I spoke with Raphi one more time, did some last minute packing and touched base with my travel agent. While I normally book my own short flights online these days, this time I'd used my travel agent and for once I was not sorry I'd paid her surcharge. She was on top of the ticket situation and called to let me know my flight was still booked. But she did encourage me to get to the airport even an hour earlier than I normally would since there would be lots of people trying to rebook flights and it would behoove me to check in early. Janice's flight was leaving within a half hour of mine, so it made sense to share a cab over there. Unfortunately our plans to share dinner since we had such a long wait fell through since we were in separate terminals and it was too much of a pain to get from Point A to Point B. My niece Leslie also called me to let me know if I got stranded she'd come to the airport and pick me up to stay at her place, so all things considered I was fairly sanguine about my travel arrangements.

Good thing, too. I had a leisurely late lunch/early supper at the little Legal Seafoods in my terminal (I think Janice lucked out and got the full service Legal Seafoods in her terminal) and returned to my gate to find out my flight had been pushed back an hour. Then it was two hours. At this point I became concerned because my connecting flight in Charlotte was the last flight out to Gainesville. I called my travel agent and got booked on a mid morning flight from Charlotte, just in case, but I turned down the

opportunity to book a night at the Marriott property nearby. A mistake, in retrospect, but I was concerned that if the Charlotte to Gainesville flight was also late and I made it out, I'd have paid for a night at a hotel I couldn't use and couldn't cancel 'cause it was after six p.m.

So I sat in the Boston terminal and debated calling Leslie to come pick me up. I decided not to because my agent had warned me if I didn't take my flight out, even if it meant spending the night in Charlotte, I might not be able to get out of Boston until Friday at the earliest because of all the canceled passengers being rebooked.

I flew down to Charlotte and sure enough, the airport was closed for the night and the Red Cross had set up cots for the stranded passengers. But US Air still had people at their desk and I have to say, they were polite and helpful. I wasn't able to get a room at the Marriott but US Air did give us partial cost vouchers for the No Tell motel up the road, something they didn't have to do since we were stranded due to weather conditions.

The cheapie motel was a dive, but my room seemed clean enough and at least I had a bed and a shower for the next morning. I'd also had the foresight to bring a change of clothes in my carryon and I collapsed into the bed around 1 a.m., glad I was on the mid morning flight rather than the early one.

The next morning I got to the Charlotte airport in plenty of time only to learn my flight was delayed. And delayed. And delayed some more. And there was no Legal Seafoods in this airport. However, they did have rocking chairs, something I'd also experienced in the Philadelphia airport. The chairs were comfortable, high back wooden rockers and I predict more airports will be installing them as they see how much the travelers enjoy this simple pleasure. I also got to do some editing on my novel, so it wasn't a

total disaster.

Overall I felt pretty good about my travel experience. I was traveling by myself, not responsible for my kids or anyone else, I didn't even have to worry about Howard *kvetching* and fretting over the delays. In my worst case scenario, I could rent a car and drive to Gainesville in a day and a half. I could get there in one day if I drove straight through. As I saw the stranded travelers with small children, and people with medical issues, and frantic calls to employers, I kept my perspective balanced and actually enjoyed the experience as being another opportunity to gather research. When you're a writer, nothing is wasted--it's all grist for the mill.

REVIEWS!

SHANGHAI KNIGHTS

About 10 minutes into SHANGHAI KNIGHTS (We had the wrong times for ABOUT SCHMIDT and this was the only movie left in our time frame) I told myself, "If you think of this as a Hope/Cosby/Lamour movie you can get through this without too many regrets about paying retail for the tickets."

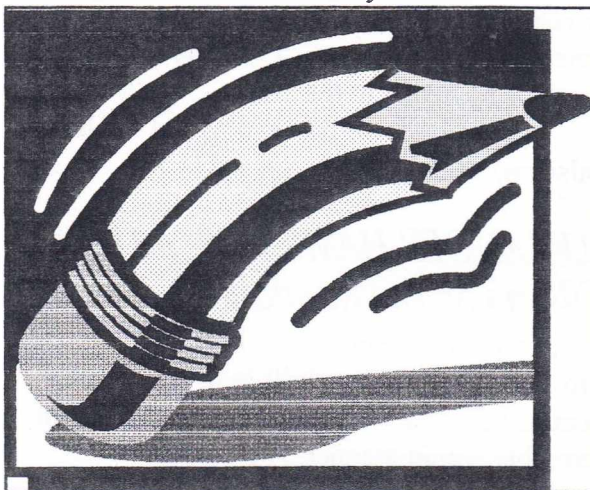
It helped. SHANGHAI KNIGHTS is the sequel to the Owen Wilson/Jackie Chan team-up in SHANGHAI NOON. Chon Wang ("John Wayne") receives news from China that his father is murdered and his baby sister is tracking down the killers. So he sets out for London with his friend O'Bannon, played by Wilson, to retrieve the Emperor's seal, rescue the maiden (his sister) and get revenge.

There is nothing the least bit historically accurate about this film but it was lightly entertaining. I recommend it as a DVD rental and it's suitable for the entire family unless you have a very low tolerance for the

occasional cussword and some "wink-wink, nudge-nudge" sex scenes.

ROAD TO PERDITION --I'd read the graphic novel, which made watching the movie an interesting experience. Normally, when you have a movie made from a novel you only have your mind's eye images of what the characters look like or the scenes. With a graphic novel it's all laid out for you.

Having said that, Tom Hanks was interesting as hitman Michael Sullivan, but I had trouble seeing him as the character, not only because I had Max Collins image of Sullivan, but also because the filmmakers took some liberties with the storyline.



They kept the basics. Michael Sullivan is a hitman working for an Irish mobster named Rooney (Looney in the book) in Illinois during the Depression. One night Sullivan's eldest son, also Michael, sneaks out and sees a mob hit by Rooney's son Connor.

The elder Sullivan assures Rooney that young Mike won't talk, but he's taking no chances. A hit is ordered on Michael and Mike, but the father figures out what's going on and escapes, while Mike's younger brother Peter, mistaken for Mike and his mother are killed by Connor. Mike was away from home that evening.

So now father and son are on the

road, literally the road to Perdition, a small town where Mike's aunt lives and can take him in. But to get there they have to outwit and outrun the mobsters sent to finish the job, and Michael Sullivan will have revenge, killing Connor.

Religion played a huge role in the book. Even the name--road to Perdition--reflects the deep, Irish Catholic faith of the principals. Michael Sullivan stops at churches and makes confession and the saints and devils are never far from their lives.

But the movie takes most of this away. Even the ending of the novel is changed, to reflect this different sensibility. It's almost as if the filmmakers are scared of the religion and faith of the characters, something that shapes their actions and reactions so firmly in the book.

The film is worth renting, but the book is also worth the effort.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON, A LIFE--William Sterne Randall--A new look at one of my favorite Founding Fathers, a man who I think gets short shrift in history books because he wasn't President and he died in an incredibly stupid manner, Alexander Hamilton. Sterne starts with the intriguing comment that when asked who was right about America, Jefferson or Hamilton, he answered that Jefferson was right for the 18th C., but Hamilton was right about modern times.

Born a bastard in the West Indies, Hamilton spent his life overcoming his background and proving himself invaluable time after time in the fight for liberty and the establishment of the new nation. Among his credits are founding the Treasury and the Coast Guard, writing the manual of arms that's still the basis for drilling American soldiers, establishing the American banking system, modern corporations and with Jefferson figuring out a stable currency,

spymaster to George Washington, military leader, and a terrible judge of character, especially women. He was brought down by his inability to keep his fly fastened, though as his biographer points out, had he lied about his affairs or simply refused to acknowledge them (like his contemporaries) he might have emerged unscathed.

I followed the Randall biography with *ALEXANDER HAMILTON AND THE PERSISTENCE OF MYTH* by Stephen F. Knott, on how over the past 200 years people have used their perceptions of Hamilton and his policies and statements to bolster their own causes, either casting him as villain or savior.

And all of this comes on the heels of what I hear is a new campaign to replace Alexander Hamilton on the US \$10 with (brace yourselves) *Ronald Reagan*. The movement seems to be drawing little support in Washington, but if you hear your representatives favoring it I would encourage you to ask them to vote against such a measure. There's no comparison and Hamilton deserves better treatment for all he did to help our country struggle towards independence and sovereignty, even if you disagree with some of his points of view.

MAILING COMMENTS!

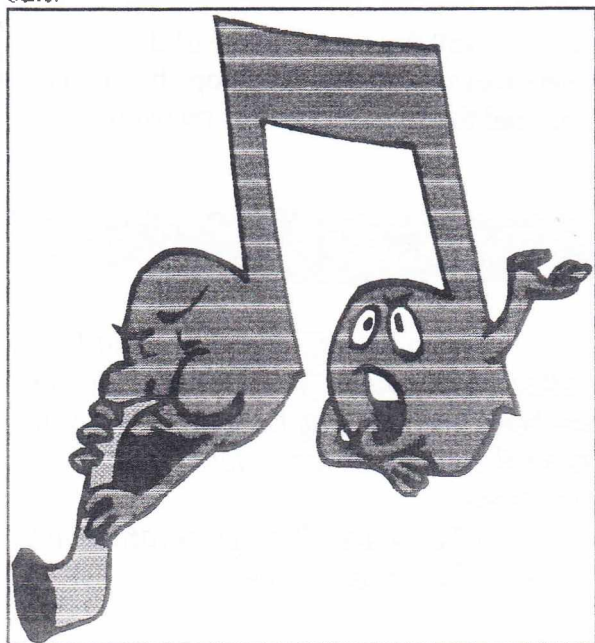
Brooks--Ct.

Dengrove: There's a great scene in *THE PIANIST*, taken from real life, where a dealer in the Warsaw Ghetto needs Szpilman to stop playing the piano so he can verify that the coins he's given are



real gold. The man "rings" the coins on the marble table top, and sure enough there's a clinker in the lot. Literally. The noise the false coin makes is how he determines it's not true gold.// The graphic novel **THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN** makes use of "cavorite" as a plot device. You'd likely enjoy this novel--it's best appreciated by people who read a lot of late 19th/early 20th century speculative fiction. I have hopes for the movie this summer, but knowing Hollywood I'm sure they'll substantially dumb it down.////###

Lynch--Thanks for the info on Leroy Anderson. I am familiar with his work (I love "The Typewriter") but didn't know much about the composer before I read your column.//Ct. Me: Don't be envious of Raphi's excursion to see "The Magic Flute". I envisioned a trip to the Boston Opera House (or whatever the prime concert venue is) with ladies in jewels and men in tuxes. I fretted because Raphi only had a sportcoat, not his suit.



Turned out to be a minor production

of "The Magic Flute" staged in a church basement hall and produced by people who thought Mozart's vision needed to be seriously tweaked. For instance, the spirits pirouetting through the woods were --I swear, I'm not making this up--lumberjacks. Somebody's been watching too much Monty Python. The sets were cheesy and looked like a middle school production, but he said for the most part the singing was decent.

Not quite the Sydney Opera House, but it was an interesting evening out.////###

Hlavaty--Your Hundred Phrases is one of the reasons I love this APA. I get so little quality entertainment in my life. *sigh*

Markstein--Hanging out with some of the gay folks in my writers' groups, the whole idea of "The Rawhide Kid" being done over with a gay protagonist sounds too much like our periodic "My Favorite Porn Titles" threads.

And "Shaving Ryan's Privates" is still up there as one of *my* favorites, but I digress. Thanks for sharing the info.

Lillian--Ct. Me: What was it Marvel used to award to people who spotted errors? The "Noprize"? You get one for the "pissed off" anachronism. I actually had that phrase in brackets in my original text, a note to self to check later, but your comment sent me to Cassell's Dictionary of Slang where I found out, sure enough, it was a phrase dating from the 1940's (according to Cassell's). Thanks for the reminder!////###

Schlosser--Ct. Larson: I remember in the 80's doing research on AIDS for our drug prevention programs and at that time it was believed use of Amyl.Nitrate ("Poppers") could impair the immune system. Amyl was a party drug most popular in the gay

community, hence the link. I don't know if that's still believed to be true, as I haven't researched it in over ten years. And I don't know if the gay community still favors "poppers".

My condolences to Kay on the loss of her father. And this is an awkward segue, but my condolences to all of you on the loss of Corky. Our dogs bring so much to our lives, and yet their own lives are so ephemeral. Yofi's lying on her bed across from me as I type this, the "muse" who's in my office every morning ready to lend an ear to a rant or a reading aloud of some tricky dialogue. Now that she's four years old she's lost some of her "puppyness" but every now and then she'll grab a dog toy and prance down the hall with it, just to let us know she's still a kid at heart.////###

Strickland--Good to hear you've got your dean on your side, and I have confidence you'll pull this off without too much trouble. Ct. Me: Interesting about the client being dropped by the agent because of illness. It's a strange business.////###

Lillian--Good gracious, Guy! What a way to end the year. Are you all better now? Notice I don't ask if you're back to normal...////###

Feller--That's right, you're building a new house! For a moment when I saw the cover I thought another tornado and gone through the Southland.////###

Brown--I am very much looking forward to Vol. 2 of THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN. And I'm sorry I didn't buy the issues when they first came out, but the trade paper publication does have the additional text material, which is nice.////###

Weisskopf--Should I be alarmed when I find myself agreeing with you and Hank (on some points) regarding politics? And here I've still been thinking of myself as a moderately liberal Democrat. I did vote for Gore and would again tomorrow, but otherwise a lot of what you said made sense to me.

I think I need to lie down until the feeling goes away, or increase my contribution to Greenpeace or something.////###

Copeland, J--And your arguments against the war make sense too. I'm just dazed and confused about the whole thing.//*Smothered* sounds like a show I'd really enjoy watching--with Howard, since we're both huge Smothers Brothers fans. I'll look for it on Bravo.// I've got the soundtrack for K-19, THE WIDOWMAKER. I've never seen the movie but I've been assured it's the best part.// Oooh, THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST! What an incredible movie and one that, like DR. STRANGELOVE, is probably still fun even if some of the references will be dated.// I hope by the time you read this Liz will be fully recovered.////###



And so it goes. As war rages in Iraq, I cultivate my garden. The roses are blooming, the herbs are bouncing back from their winter turmoil, and it is so far removed from bloodshed.

"Where have all the graveyards gone? Gone for flowers, every one."

Eve