

GUILTY PLEASURES #29

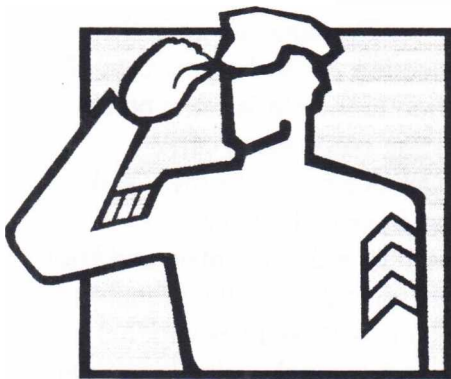
SFPA 234

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by Eve Ackerman

Those of you who asked about Lance Cpl. Adam Brown, my Marine neighbor, I'm pleased to report that the Iron Gator Battalion returned to Jacksonville from Iraq on July 3, and on the 4th of July Adam was welcomed home with a rousing neighborhood party and cookout. His parents were there, and his younger sister, who's a student at the local community college, and his girlfriend, an elementary school teacher (whom we all predict will soon be his fiancée).



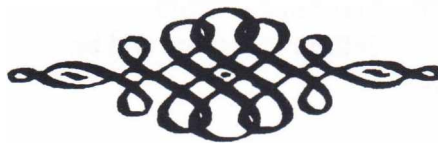
The whole street was there for the cookout, along with Adam's friends from church and some of his classmates. Adam looked very good, and he hugged me and thanked me for the letters I wrote him.

"Your letters were very funny," he said. "We all enjoyed reading them."

It seems the custom was to share letters around the unit, those that weren't too personal, because some of the soldiers didn't have people writing to them. Adam saved all the letters he received and said just hearing about people going about their normal lives was a morale boost to the troops.

So now his plans are to go back to UF in August and finish his last semester. Adam will receive his BA in Computer Science and I think even in this market he'll have no trouble getting a job--a Marine just returned from combat who's been selling, repairing and writing software for computers since he was a kid should do all right.

He'll finish his term in the Reserves, but said he has no plans to re-up. Once was enough.



And then, two days later we heard that 22 year old Spc. Jeffrey Wershow was coming home from Iraq to be buried on the family farm.

You probably heard the story on the news about the American soldier killed at Baghdad University. He wasn't getting a

soda, as the news reported. He was escorting some diplomats around campus, but the rest of the story is true. A man walked up out of the crowd and knowing the soldiers wear body armor, shot Jeffrey in the head.

I didn't know Jeffrey, but he had friends in common with Raphi. And I know Jeffrey's parents. Not as well as Howard does, but I know them. Both are attorneys, and Jon, Jeffrey's father, is a member of B'nai Israel, and asked Howard to do the funeral service. Jon and Howard were undergraduates together at UF, and were in AZA, a Jewish youth organization, as teens.

Jeffrey was known around town as a budding political activist and a young man who loved his country. He joined ROTC and when he switched to a private school that didn't offer ROTC, he got permission from his former school to continue serving in that unit. He ran the campaign for a local state representative, and he

Stuff

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was serving in the student senate and running for student president of Santa Fe Community College when his Guard unit got called up. Jeffrey had already done four years with the Army in the 82nd Airborne. He was staying in the National Guard so he could go to college and still do military service, possibly with an eye towards re-enlisting afterwards. One of Jeffrey's friends said Jeffrey felt strongly that if he was going to run for office he needed to know how to lead, and the best place to do that and serve your country was in the military. I recall seeing a letter from Jeffrey in the Gainesville Sun during the war, saying that antiwar protests back home hurt the morale of the troops in Iraq. He was conservative, but he cared about people.

His funeral arrangements were so complex the logistics were handled by a local white funeral home and a black funeral home, an indication of how many lives Jeffrey touched and the kind of person he was.

Over 1,000 people came to the funeral, held in the auditorium of Jeffrey's high school, and the burial at the farm was with full military honors. In addition to those awards, medals and commendations he received while alive, he was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, the Combat Infantry Badge, the Purple Heart and the Florida Cross, the Florida National Guard's highest honor. Two generals spoke, as well as local dignitaries.

I spent time with the family afterwards, during the days when they were sitting *shivah*, the seven day period that begins formal mourning. Every night Jeffrey's friends would show up, wanting to be with the Wershows and the Madisons and the Brames, the families that blended together so well after Jeffrey's parents' divorce and remarriage, that the blended families spent all their holidays together, sharing in the closeness. And now, they were together for one another, Jeffrey's parents and step-parents, his biological siblings and his step/half siblings, showing us what good people are capable of under tragic circumstances.

You can watch countless newscasts, you can hear hours of analysis, but it's the sight of a flag draped coffin bearing the body of one of your community's best and brightest that brings home the reality of the war. And the senselessness of a young man's death in a land far from the alfalfa fields of his family's farm.

Jeffrey Wershow will be missed.

Book Reviews--

Here's to the Ladies--Stories of the Frontier Army—Carla Kelly--

Carla Kelly is best known for her Regency Romances, and has a very loyal following, which includes Janice and myself in their numbers. She writes good books about good people, people who are not always

at the top of the social tier but do their best to live lives of honor and morality.

In this Kelly stands apart from many of the other Regency authors who depend on situations involving the aristocracy and its foibles to tell a tale.

Now Kelly's branched out into a new subgenre, the Western short story. Her day job includes being a ranger for the national Park Service at the Fort Union Trading Post national historic site on the Montana/Dakota border where she leads tours and sometimes takes a turn as a reinactor. It's likely this latter role that inspired her to tell stories of the characters who lived in the frontier forts, especially the army wives whose tales were often overlooked.

The nine stories in the collection cover the post Civil War period in the old West, where a posting could mean career advancement for the men, and dust, insects, Indian attacks, freezing, endless winters and high child mortality for their families. Kelly tells these tales with her usual deft touch, using humor and real sentiment, not contrived situations and too many adjectives. It's hard to pick a favorite, but one that I went back and reread was *CASUALLY AT POST*, where an army doctor has to deal with all the normal stresses of his job, along with a lunatic who shows up one day claiming to be God. Augustus Gustavus God, to be precise. An amusing and touching

story of what's really important in life.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix--J.K. Rowling--

I loved it. Just loved it. One review said Harry, who's now 15, was acting out so much they should have called him "Harry Snotter." Well, *duh!* Speaking as the mother of a recent 15 year old, I thought Rowling perfectly pegged how adolescent males on the cusp of manhood behave. They're confused, they're angry, they think people are withholding information from them (they are) and they're fed up with the world crapping on them.

Frankly, I don't blame Harry for having some major attitude at this point.

Movies--PIRATES OF THE CARRIBEAN--

This is the summer movie you don't want to miss. Talk about swashbuckling popcorn fun, Johnny Depp absolutely steals this movie away from the other actors, and sets himself up as the pirate you'll never forget, "swishbuckling" Captain Jack Sparrow. I just loved it, and I'm hoping it will spark an entertainment trend for all things piratical.

I've seen the normal summer movies, the ones everyone seems to see. **MATRIX** was entertaining. The scenes on the freeway were state of the art, and

if the story line suffered, and the dialogue sounded like it came from fortune cookies, well, I'll still go to see the next one.

BRUCE ALMIGHTY--what a waste of film. Do yourself a favor: If you want to watch Jim Carey, rent **LIAR, LIAR** or **THE MASK**. If you want to watch a cutesy movie about The Big Guy, rent **OH, GOD**. Any or all of these are better than **BRUCE ALMIGHTY**, which was dumb, meanspirited and a poorly thought out vehicle to allow Jim Carey to be obnoxious.

SECRETARY--A kinky little exploration of the joys of dominance and submission, or D/S on those websites you're not supposed to be cruising at work.

But it could have been better. James Spader does weird very well, but this movie either didn't go far enough, or went too far in the wrong directions. It could have used some more coherent writing to make it stand out.

LATE MARRIAGE--An Israeli film billed as another "My Big Fat Greek Wedding". It's not. I wouldn't even call it a comedy. It's a depressing look at people behaving badly, as a Georgian (that's former Soviet Union, not that place north of Florida) emigrant in Israel is being pressured by his family to marry a girl, but the right girl--young, virgin, Georgian. Not the Israeli divorcee he's been seeing.

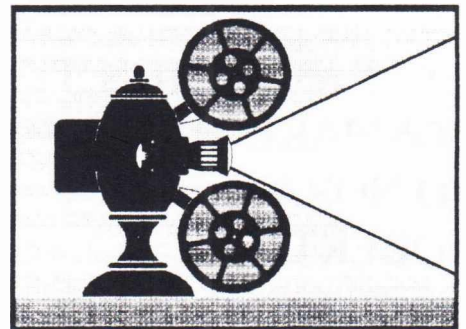
I'd pass on this one, if I were you.

LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN--

Another waste of film. The graphic novel was *so* much better, the characters were deeper, the story, well, there was a real story, not this plotless fightfest I had to sit through for the second half of this film. And the whole subtext about Alan Quartermain and Secret Agent Tom Sawyer (who wasn't even in the British based graphic novel), how obvious can you get? Bludgeon me with some more fake sentimentality, why don't you?

Anyway, I didn't like it.

FINDING NEMO--Another animation hit from PIXAR, good fun for the entire family. The story is a familiar one, but the state of the art animation and wonderful voices make this a deserved summer blockbuster.



MOSTLY MARTHA--

I rented this little German film after reading glowing reviews last year, but not having anyone in

the house who wanted to watch it with me. Micah's up for subtitled movies, but I believe he'd draw the line at romance.

MOSTLY MARTHA is the story of a successful chef at an upscale, trendy German restaurant, but while Martha can do no wrong in the kitchen, she has no life outside of it. She's a perfectionist, and the people around her aren't perfect like she is. Her boss makes her go to therapy, and Martha doesn't understand why, when she just sees herself doing her best.

Then Martha's sister dies and she's given guardianship of her headstrong young niece, and suddenly Martha's life is filled with noise and chaos, aggravated by a new Italian assistant chef who dances in the kitchen, plays romantic music on his boombox as he cooks, and doesn't take any crap off the head chef, Martha.

A very sweet, charming look at what it really means to have family, and a real life, chaos and all.

AT LEAST I DIDN'T COMPARE MYSELF TO NORA ROBERTS....

I was in the car today, returning from an out of town wedding with my husband, Howard, and our former Rabbi. As Howard drove, Rabbi Allan and I were discussing the Book of Ruth which we'd just finished

reading, as we always do, at the Spring festival of Shavuot (Pentecost).

"*Ruth* is structured like a novel," I said, "and not only a novel, but a romance novel!" "How is it like a romance novel?" Allan asked.

"It's got everything-- dialogue, internal and external tension, goals, motivation and conflict. Forget for a moment the discussion of whether the story is about Ruth and Naomi and concentrate on the story of Ruth and Boaz. It's 'boy meets girl, boy almost loses girl, boy gets girl back' and there's a happily ever after ending with a marriage. Ruth meets Boaz, there's an attraction, the attraction builds, you have that midnight scene on the threshing room floor, Boaz could lose Ruth to the man who has a closer claim on her as a bride, and then that incredibly dramatic denouement where Boaz wins Ruth through the cunning way he presents his case before the Elders. What a great scene! I couldn't have written it better myself!"

This last statement was met with stunned silence from the back of the car.

"How very modest of you, Eve," the rabbi finally said.

Howard, meanwhile, is laughing his butt off, and I can feel my face turning red as a persimmon.

I cleared my throat.

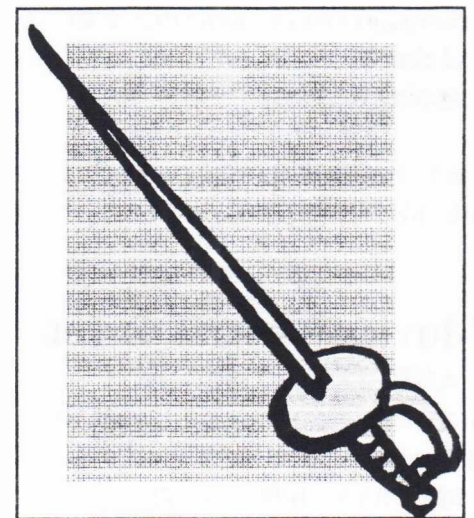
"When I borrow plot details, I only crib from the best," I said.

GIFT GIVING IS AN ART--

My brother Mitch sent me a gift for my birthday which Micah said raised my coolness level among the neighborhood moms by geometric amounts.

"Other moms get sweaters. You got a sword."

Mitch likes collecting reproduction swords. He saw one online, ordered it, but when it arrived it wasn't quite what he was looking for. But it was slender and had a nice balance and he thought a pirate porn writer like



me would enjoy it.

The sword is a reproduction of a Spanish rapier with a basket hilt. One of these days I'm going to put up some hooks in my office area and hang it, but in the meantime it's leaning up against the wall, looking inspirational.

THE WRITING

BUSINESS--

And speaking of writing and inspiration, a lot has happened these past months, due in no small part to the efforts of Janice Gelb. Janice agreed to look my completed manuscript over and wasn't afraid to say I had a sagging middle. I'd read Janice's comments, gnash my teeth, say a few unpleasant words and then try to change the scene, just to see what it would look like.

And you know what? 9 times out of 10, she was absolutely right. The upshot of all of this is I got some agent queries for full or partial manuscripts on *CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY*. And my e-book publisher is nagging me to sign a contract for a print edition of *PIRATE'S PRICE*, but I told her I'm holding off on that until I sell *SINISTER* and finish the book formerly known as *SMUGGLER'S GOLD*, now retitled *SMUGGLER'S BRIDE*. Not just because I know what marketers want in romance titles, but because the book really is about the marriage, and the gold is just a mcguffin.

Speaking of agents and writing though, I got a strange response to one of my queries. The agent in question had been recommended by an editor who had my book in his possession, so this is how my letter starts out:

"Dear Ms. _____,
_____ of _____ contacted me regarding my historical romances, and suggested your name when I said I was looking for an agent. I

have sent him a copy of my novel, *CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY*.

"In *CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY* (103,000 words), privateer Morgan Roberts is ready for a change. Some boys dream of leaving the farm and running away to sea. Morgan dreams of leaving the sea and running away to farm. But he's been at sea since he left the orphanage and has had few opportunities to meet nice ladies who want to get married and settle down on his Florida farm. When the widow Amanda Stephenson (a nice lady down to her toes) becomes his reluctant guest, it must be a sign she's the one for him. Nor matter what her own plans are.

"I believe *CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY* will appeal to readers who like well researched historical romance with humor, strong heroines, and heroes who are out of the ordinary. That manuscript is complete and ready to sell. I'm now working on my third romance, working title *SMUGGLER'S BRIDE*, set in 1840's Territorial Florida."

And so on. The rest of the one page letter was the usual bio information, offers to send her full or partial manuscript, etc.

The letter back from the agent (actually, she scrawled this on my letter to her) says, "Eve, This might be an interesting story, but we're concerned about logistical problems. He's been at sea since he left the orphanage;

how did he acquire a farm?"

This was sent along with a rejection slip.

I was flabbergasted. I read it through again, 'cause I couldn't believe after I told her *an editor had my book in hand and recommended her* that this was her response.

So I took a deep breath and said, out loud, "He sometimes gets off the ship to spend his loot and get his ashes hauled, YOU STUPID BIMBO!"

My writers' group agreed that this is probably not the right agent for me, and I did go back and slightly modify that paragraph to avoid any future confusion. I'd like to think most agents and editors are brighter than this one, but why take a chance?

KID STUFF--Raphi's

doing his second year as a counselor at Camp Ramah Darom in north Georgia, and keeps in touch by recording messages on his answering service for his cell phone. The first session the boys (he has 13 year olds) took his nylon frog shower pouf, tied a noose around its neck, and hung it from the rafters with a sign saying, "I can't stand it anymore. Goodbye, cruel world."

Of course, Micah's response was, "what kind of girlyboy takes a frog pouf into the shower anyway?"

The phone message also said two of Raphi's ex-girlfriends were on staff this year as well, so it should be an interesting summer.

Raphi had a great year at Brandeis, making the Dean's List both semesters. He's talking now about doing a four year Master's program, where he would get his Master's Degree and Bachelor's Degree in Politics (Political Science) simultaneously. It requires a Master's thesis, academic approval, and about six hours of graduate level work over and above the BS requirements, but it sounds like an intriguing idea.

And the Masters get to wear cooler robes at graduation.

This would mean he wouldn't be doing his planned double major of Politics and Economics. Instead, he's looking at a double minor of Economics and French, and being a double minor myself (History and Political Science), I told him it's a good idea as long as he's not overwhelmed by his thesis requirements.

I know the camp will offer him a financial incentive to re-up as a counselor for next year, but he's already said he wants to explore internships instead, maybe in the DC area.

Oh, and I got the official word that he and the mysterious Naomi I never got to meet are no longer keeping company. Maybe next winter there will be someone new I won't get to meet.

Micah is beginning to regret he dithered around and waited six months to get his learner's permit for driving. Now

he won't be able to get his regular license until the end of November, but I'm thrilled at the idea of a 16 year old boy waiting another six months before being out on the roads.



The other Micah news is we got to take a trip to the ER courtesy of a bike ride *sans* helmet. Micah was riding with a friend one Sunday afternoon (the friend *was* wearing a helmet) when Micah hit a patch of wet grass, skid, and went ass over teakettle into a wooden guardrail. Fortunately it was only two blocks from our house, and I was home. Stuart helped Micah back to the house, and while he wasn't bleeding from the head injury he was disoriented and had a goose egg, so after a phone consult with the pediatrician on call I bundled him over to North Florida Regional.

Two hours and one set of x-rays and a CAT scan later, we had the official word. Micah *does* have a brain. I know, 'cause I was in the room when they did the scan and I got to see the pretty pictures. And again, fortunately, he has a hard head and came away from it all with a bad bump, a major

headache and a sprained shoulder. And a promise to me that he'll wear his helmet from now on.

As a writer I found the entire experience inspirational. It's one thing to write about your heroine taking a hit on the noggin, it's another to be able to observe those symptoms up close and personal. I went back to CAPTAIN SINISTER'S LADY and made sure to include nausea along with the other mild concussion symptoms.

Right now (July) Micah's in Washington State with Outdoor Adventure, a camping program sponsored by United Synagogue Youth. It's four weeks of hiking and tenting in the Pacific Northwest, with kosher food, daily prayers and Sabbath observance, so it sounds perfect for him.

Even better, it's a *coed* program. This is Micah's golden opportunity to meet Jewish girls who like kayaking and camping. I was a little worried about summer romances blooming under the stars, but Micah looked at me and said, "We're going to be living in tents and not using deodorant for four weeks. Stop worrying."

His counselor insisted Micah bring the banjo along. He'd been hesitant until they told him there's a van that follows behind the campers--they have to backpack their personal belongings, sleeping bags and some of the gear, but the heavy stuff comes in the van, and they can take musical instruments in there as well.

We haven't heard from him, nor do I expect to before he gets back to Seattle at the end of the month. But it sounds like a wonderful program.

Fan Sightings--

After a false start I got to have lunch with Tom Feller on one of his trips to Gainesville. Since the Cabot Lodge is on the SW side of town, in Studentville, and I live in the "townie" Northwest I let the Cabot staff recommend a restaurant and we had a lovely lunch given that it was in the Archer Road fast food corridor. Best of all I got to catch up with some real SFPA face time.

I wish I was going to DSC, but Torcon's going to cost me more than I expected, and I feel like I just paid off the card on Boskone, so those will be my fannish trips for this year.



MAILING COMMENTS, SFPA 232:

S. Hughes--Good work on saving a piece of 3-D film history, and Florida history as well. Too bad you only had a couple days

though, as I'm 60 miles west of St. Augustine. Perhaps on your next trip to Florida we'll be able to get together.////###

Brown--Hurrah! You have a Gainesville Sun headline in The Lower Case! About time, too.////###

Mailing Comments, SFPA 233--

Lynch--Great article on Harry Warner, Jr. Thanks for sharing it with us.//ct. Me: Yes, Richard Dreyfuss in *The Goodbye Girl* was exactly what I thought of while listening to Raphi describe his excruciating experience of the low rent Mozart production. ////###

Weisskopf-Reinhardt--

I haven't read the Koran, so I don't feel qualified to comment on it, but I do have concerns any time a religious document is translated, as the Koran must be for most American readers to understand it. I see this problem all the time with translations of the Jewish Scriptures. For instance, there isn't a commandment "Thou shalt not kill." The Hebrew is very clear in saying "You shall not murder", using a different word than the word for "kill". There's a difference between killing, say in self defense, and outright murder for gain or pleasure. Another mistranslation (and one of my

favorite examples) is in the Garden of Eden, where Eve is referred to in English translations as Adam's "helpmate". That's not what she's called in the Hebrew. There she's known as his *ezer kenegdo*, a word that means "assisting adversary"--the one who cares enough about you to tell you when you're wrong. To me, that's a very different meaning than "helpmate".

Anyway, without a clear understanding of Arabic it's hard for me to feel that English translations of the Koran without accompanying study and commentary are going to give me at all a clear idea of what Muslims believe.

A good SF novel about modern Muslim/Christian cultural clashes is *THE VEILED WEB* by Catherine Asaro.////###

Brown--Here's a headline I've been saving just for you. From the Florida Times-Union, Friday, June 13: **DRUG PROGRAM FOR MEDICARE GAINS INERTIA.**

Great Florida cover on your zine. Thanks for sharing. ////###

Copeland, J.--*Mazel Tov* to Allie (and to you) on her being named *the* outstanding artist at her magnet school. I know what an honor that is. And I'm sure she'll be happy matriculating with the bunnies.

Micah's starting to think about colleges, and I've expressed a desire for him to stay east of the

Mississippi. A friend's daughter is going to Reed, and they hardly ever see her because of the travel time between Florida and Oregon. But it's early days yet.////###

Copeland, L.--It's very encouraging to hear you're on the mend. ////###



Lillian--You've convinced me (not that I needed a lot of convincing), I'm ready to return to Oz.////###

Larson-- "Passages" indeed! Your piece on hormone replacement therapy was very interesting, and thought provoking. I wonder how many MD's are up to date on treating women who present these symptoms?////###

Gelb--Part of what is annoying me most in the Jayson Blair situation is how everyone ignored the signs that this guy wasn't ethical. His fellow reporters said it in college, and no one listened. He got away with mistake after mistake--hell, I had an editor swear he'd fire me if I spelled

judgment with an "e" ever again! I knew what he'd do to me if I had fact errors (an automatic "F" on any journalism paper at UF)! But no one stopped Blair.

But what really, really makes me see red is his smartass, cocky, "I've got a book deal!" attitude after the fact. From my point of view, this man should not be profiting from this travesty, but that too is the American way. Shame on everyone who buys his book, and shame on his publisher for buying it in the first place.//

Thanks for the reminder, I've been meaning to rent METROPOLIS. Micah's become a big fan of foreign and alternative movies, so I'll likely wait until he returns to get it.//

I saw pictures of the new VAIO in Newsweek. Is that model on your short list? //

Ct. Me: Yes, too often in our house Micah and Howard hear sentences that begin "I was thinking about you today while Yofi was taking a crap..." I've started wearing my little Eagle Creek belt bag on the walks and carrying a Levenger's "matchbox" notepad in it in case I get inspired.

(Just for clarification, the Eagle Creek bag is for the notepad. I carry a newspaper "sleeve" for the dog poop.)

This may be the end of inspirational walks for a while though. Even by 8:30 in the morning it's too hot for Yofi on the asphalt, and even better, Howard's begun walking with us at night. I gave him a pedometer

and suggested he work up to a daily goal of 10,000 steps. Walking the dog helps, and the pedometer motivates him, but we'll see if it continues when Micah returns and our schedules are more normal.////###

Gelb, again--I'd say it's a very special gift to go to a con and come back with more money than when you left. But I was glad to read the full Baycon report. I didn't realize it was a "for profit" convention. How did that come about?////###

Robe--Yes, it *is* different having teenage boys in the house--the attitude, the foul language, the smells, it's all part of the joy of parenting. And I wouldn't trade it for a single moment with a toddler. I mean, how many three year olds want to watch foreign flicks with you?//

I love your idea of the flying Dells at the airports, decapitating terrorist mannequins. Would that be fun, or what?////###

Copeland, again--Your Leftover Quotations, Part Six will be a welcome addition to our bathroom reading material. Thanks for sharing.////###

And that's all for this disty. See you in 60, **Eve**