

# Guilty Pleasures #40

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## Travels to Scotland

### Interaction delivers the goods

Going to an overseas Worldcon is always an adventure. You know you shouldn't be comparing it to North American Worldcons, but it's hard not to. You're used to a certain way of doing things, a certain standard of performance, and in the best ugly American tradition you wonder if you'll have that kind of experience, or one equally as good.

I can say that Interaction was one of the more enjoyable Worldcons I've attended, but then, I was expecting it to be that good. And Howard liked it too. He went to the business meeting, found some ~~Roberts Rules Works~~ kindred souls and is looking forward to the WSFS meeting at LaconIV.

Be afraid, be very afraid.

My "Darlene Marshall" panels were successful, and each of the program items I was on played to a full house. I also enjoyed working for Janice in Programme Ops and bought some interesting books in the dealers' room. Mike Walsh sold out his last copies of my books there, which made me *very* happy. And we got to meet, greet and eat with some of our fellow SFPAns, always a fun time.

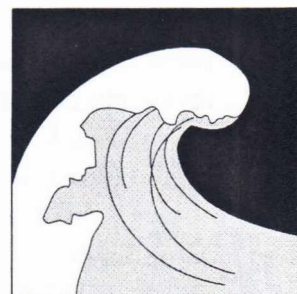
Scotland itself was delightful, though I didn't get to see as much of the country as I wished. Howard rented a car that still has my claw marks in the upholstery since driving in the Scotland wasn't good for his heart or my nervous system. He says he'd have gotten it down in a couple more days, but I'm not sure I would have survived that long.

## Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma

I can't improve on what's already been said by others regarding the failures at all levels of government, the poor planning and mismanagement, the cost in human tragedy, but I will add this: I feel really, really guilty because I'm glad it missed us. A natural reaction, I know, nonetheless I'm relieved we took a pass this year.

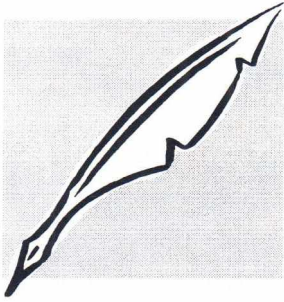
I helped in the relief effort in a number of ways, the most personal being by signing onto a program with my publisher where I donated all of my royalties for September to hurricane relief, and she matched my contribution with an equal amount.

BTW, a friend whose home is now underwater and who has relocated to Gainesville offered this piece of advice—if you have a laptop, be sure it's with your emergency evacuation supplies, and have a national email address known to your friends and family. Using the Tulane address and servers only works if Tulane isn't waterlogged.



## Natter, some of it lifted from my blogs...

I have two blogs going now. A personal one under "eackerman" at LiveJournal, and a Darlene Marshall one called "Darlene's Digest" at Blogspot. I fear blogging may replace apas with today's generation of fans, because why wait for comments when you can get them right now? However, I'm hanging in there with the old fashioned methods 'cause y'all are here too. So here's some random blog natter:



When my dear husband says "I don't know what to buy you!" I always try to keep it easy for him. I tell him he can buy me expensive jewelry or book gift certificates. And can there be anything more tempting than a book sale for a good cause? Where you're spending money on something you want anyway, probably more money than you should, because you know a percentage goes to charity? It almost takes the guilt out of guilty pleasures.

Goerings Books in Gainesville, Florida, is an independent bookstore that not only has the good taste to carry signed copies of Darlene Marshall's books, but also donates a percentage of proceeds to charity through most of November and December. You buy during certain weeks depending on who you wish to be the recipient--Women's Studies at UF, various children's programs, etc.

So when Goerings was hosting one of these events yesterday, with wine to help lubricate sales, I ended up walking out with a slew of books. Two of them are new research volumes: *Frolicking Bears, Wet Vultures, and Other Oddities--A New York City Journalist in Nineteenth-Century Florida* by Jerald T. Milanich. The second book is *Trade and Privateering in Spanish Florida, 1732-1763* by Joyce Elizabeth Harman.

I can hardly wait to dig into these. And I feel no guilt at all. And barely any for also putting *Talk to the Hand* by Lynne Truss in the shopping cart.

Like most of you, I have a number of books on my TBR shelves. Some of them are library books, and the library gets snippy about them not being returned on time.

So why did I spend the day rereading *The Grand Sophy*?

Maybe because when I read Georgette Heyer I can study her craft, to try and learn how she makes secondary characters leap off the page with every bit as much life as primary characters. Maybe it's because I love how she milks the English language for all it's worth, expecting the reader to rise to her level, and not dumbing down.

Maybe because it's just a damned entertaining read that still makes me grin at key passages.

Whatever the reason, I'm glad Heyer's books are being reissued, and I hope a new generation comes to love her writing as much as my generation of romance readers and writers did.

Oh, and if you haven't read it, *The Grand Sophy* was written in 1950 and is the story of a strong willed young woman in Regency England who sets out to make sure people around her end up with the right mates, not neglecting her own needs in the process. And she does it with style, flair, ducklings and the occasional pistol. Read *The Grand Sophy*. You'll smile, and you'll thank me for it later.

I decided to do something different this year, now that my nest is empty. Except for Yofi, the dachshund. She still needs her mommy to feed her and take care of her. Anyway, I signed up for a *tai chi* course taught at the local community college. It runs through November, twice a week, and I'm looking forward to it. I remember being in San Francisco about 15 years ago, and since my body was still on EST I

took a long walk at dawn down to the bay. I passed a few neighborhood parks where elderly Asian folks were moving in a slow symphony of grace, greeting the day and keeping their bodies limber.

Now I need to get some really cool silk pajamas to do my *tai chi* in. I did get the *tai chi* shoes, and they do help. But the sweatpants and t-shirt are not giving me the look I want.

I just came from my first *tai chi* class and it was interesting. The instructor reminded us that even though we thought we were there to improve flexibility or exercise without hurting our joints, we were learning a martial art. From his perspective, much of the value we get from the class is the defensive aspect of it--how to block blows and avoid being injured. I could see that in the moves, and I enjoyed learning the initial steps. It was all about feeling your entire body and centering it, rather than just calling on bits and parts to work too hard, and other parts to not carry their share of the load. And while the movements were slow and easy, I'm definitely feeling a burn now in my shoulders and lower back, but it doesn't feel bad--just like I've used muscles I don't normally use.

I'm glad I signed up for this.

The *tai chi* classes are progressing, though at this point I feel like a centipede--I can walk just fine until I stop to think about what all those feet are doing. Our instructor tries to soothe our frazzled spirits by assuring us that it takes at least three classes along with daily repetition to learn the most basic of moves, but I still feel like an idiot each time I look up and everyone else has their hand in a perfect bird's beak, while my hand is somewhere off in the ozone.

\*sigh\* But I'm not giving up! It's good for me, I do feel better afterwards, and it's improving my balance already. I can feel myself shifting positions when I'm just standing around, straightening my back, relaxing my spine, centering my feet. And it is good for research. When I'm blocking out a fight scene, I'll be better able to describe how someone wards off a blow or shifts away from attack.

Oddly enough, I joked about "wax on, wax off", but there's a lot of truth to that scene from Karate Kid. You repeat basic motions over and over until your body has them memorized and your responses become automatic. That's my goal with these classes--to become so comfortable with it that just like that centipede, I'm not thinking about what my feet are doing and I'm moving all 100 of them in perfect rhythm



I'm sitting here with a half full bowl of Halloween candy, wondering where all the kids in our neighborhood are. One of the things that prompted our move to our subdivision was trick-or-treating with friends who already lived here. Howard and Jack walked through the neighborhood with Raphi and Katie, and Howard was especially impressed with the friendliness of all the residents, and the large number of kids who were walking from door to door.

That was in 1988. Today our neighborhood still has youngsters, but they weren't walking around and stopping at my door. Instead, we got out-of-neighborhood cars driving in and stopping every few houses. Nothing wrong with that, although one of the joys of Halloween for me used to be walking my neighborhood, but I can't help but wonder why trick-or-treating just isn't what it used to be. Is it a post 9/11 thing?

I just came from seeing *Good Night and Good Luck* and would encourage all of you to see it. I'm prejudiced, 'cause when you're a Broadcast News major in college you learn Edward R. Murrow was the gold standard in broadcast reporting, but this is an important movie. I wish every high school civics class could take a field trip to the theater to learn about the days when CBS was the news operation other news



operations wanted to be when they grew up, when a handful of people could risk their careers for the truth, when owners understood the delicate balance between appeasing sponsors and being true to your beliefs.

I especially liked that they only showed Sen. Joe McCarthy in his own words, using archival news footage from the era. It would be easy to dismiss McCarthy's portrayal if some actor made you wonder if he was really like that. Seeing the real deal makes it all that much more dramatic.

And David Strathairn is wonderful as Murrow, even if his voice is lighter and higher than Murrow's distinctive delivery. See it. It's a quality film.

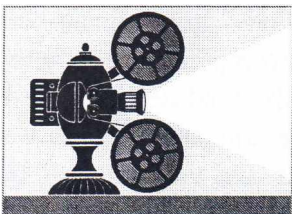
I got involved in a discussion at another site today where a reader wanted the author of a bestselling novel to go back and write a scene that took place off-stage, because the reader thought this would enhance her enjoyment of the novel.

It's an issue that's been bothering me more and more lately--readers who want all the blanks filled in. I don't want to see drawings of Jamie and Claire or have missing scenes drawn out for me. The author didn't write a graphic novel, and I prefer the pictures in my head based on her character descriptions.

The best compliment I ever got on my own writing was from a friend who read *Smuggler's Bride* and told me I'd described his grandma's farmhouse out in the piney woods, all the way down to the detached kitchen. His vision of my cabin was to see his grandma's house, and that was fine with me. It meant I'd given him enough detail that he could use his imagination to fill in the blanks, even if the house he saw wasn't the same as the house I saw in my mind.

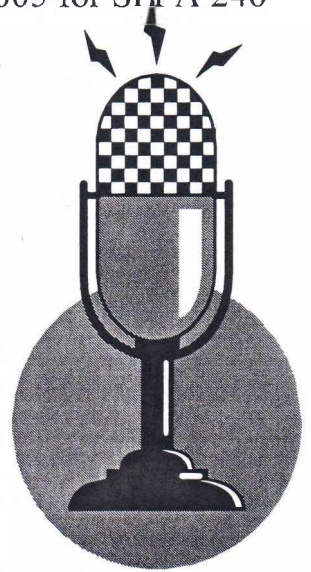
For the same reason, I've always resisted character covers on my books because I don't want a cover artist to show his/her version of my characters. I want the readers to have their own vision of what my characters look like based on my descriptive powers.

Although when I saw Nathan Fillion as Captain Mal in *Firefly*, after I finished writing *Smuggler's Bride*, there was a "Hmmm...." moment, but even he doesn't look quite how I envision Rand Washburn. Which is not to say if I sold the movie rights and he was cast in the role I'd bitch about it. Might even try to get myself invited onto the set.



We saw *The Legend of Zorro* last night. I want those 2.5 hours of my life back. I was bored, I was insulted, I was not amused. The movie was a bloated mish-mash of alternate universe history and poor writing. And what is it with Hollywood? Is the real story of California statehood so tedious that you have to bring in the Confederate army and Abraham Lincoln to make it interesting? Not to mention all the good guys being color-blind and PC, while the bad guys usually espouse attitudes more in keeping with the times? Would it have made the movie worse if you didn't confuse the schoolchildren watching this PG disaster? What's wrong with having them thinking California achieved statehood in 1850 under President Fillmore, not under Abe Lincoln? You could have had the whole "The bad guys are in a world domination secret society" scenario and still bring in the concept of splitting the country over Southern secession in 1850 without faking it up by having Pinkerton agents working for the feds (Allen Pinkerton began his career in Chicago in 1850), General Beauregard (I swear, I'm not making that up) reference the Confederate States and the Confederacy, and an Abraham Lincoln look-alike shake the Governor's hand and congratulate him on achieving statehood.

\*Sigh\* The dumbing down of America. If it's not Intelligent Design, it's warped history in bad movies.



## Books!

**WHY IS SEX FUN?--Jared Diamond**—Stop snickering. This is a serious anthropological study by the author of GUNS, GERMS AND STEEL who asks the all important question “Is there any good biological reason for a human penis to be longer than 1 1/2 inches?” He doesn’t say, “Where is the intelligent design in the dangly bits?” but he does ask the questions people are afraid to ask. OK, maybe they’re not afraid to ask, but it just doesn’t occur to non-scientist types to ask “Why is sex fun?”

Some of the conclusions he draws are fascinating, and thought provoking, just as GUNS, GERMS AND STEEL was thought provoking. I was especially intrigued as to why it makes sense for human women to undergo menopause, even though it doesn’t happen in the animal kingdom, nor do men go through a similar phase.

**COLLAPSE--Jared Diamond**—You can keep your Lovecraft Award winners, *this* was the most horrifying book I’ve read this year. Diamond shows how environmental, political and economic factors converge to drive a civilization—ancient or modern—into has-been status. Why failure to plan means planning to fail. And he writes some neat and unexpected things about a major oil company or two. An important, if scary book.

One of the more interesting comments he made, apropos of nothing except the current state of affairs in Iraq, is the difference between how the JFK White House dealt with the Bay of Pigs, and how it dealt with the Cuban Missile Crisis, the difference being in the first case, Kennedy didn’t want to listen to opposing POV, and in the second case, he learned from the first error and encouraged opposing POV by his aides and advisors and so helped head off a nuclear war.

Having a president who’ll listen to dissenters—priceless.

**FREAKONOMICS--Leavitt and Dubner**—A fascinating and thought provoking book that reminded me of *The Tipping Point*, books that take conventional wisdom and re-examine it. In Freakonomics, economist Leavitt and author Dubner explore how economic issues drive so much of what we deal with in society, and not always in obvious ways. I highly recommend this for an entertaining and intellectual read.



I’m also reading a lot of books from Naval Institute Press for research, using Inter-Library Loan (Thank heavens for ILL!) This week’s reading includes *The Prize Game* (about the law of privateering), *Female Tars*, *The US Merchant Marine at War*, and *Splintering the Wooden Wall—the British Blockade of the United States During the War of 1812*. I wanted to buy *The Patriot War—The Other War of 1812* for myownself, but it retails for \$55.00, so I think I’ll keep checking out the library edition.

I have Diana Gabaldon’s newest, *A Breath of Snow and Ashes* sitting on my desk, but I don’t think I’ll start that one until the holidays. I need to spend time working on my next book now that I’ve finished my initial edits on *Captain Sinister’s Lady*. I don’t know where the new novel’s going to go, but I’ve got that cave research and the NIP books, so I’m sure I’ll come up with something.

## Caution! Kid Talk Ahead!

Well, they're still kids to me. I have an empty nest. Sort of. The nest is empty, but I manage to see Micah about once a week. I call him on my way downtown to the Farmers' Market and say, "Since I'm driving past your dorm anyway, would you like me to drop off some food?" and the answer is usually "yes". This gives us a chance to chat while I pass over packages of turkey, leftovers, etc.

This isn't as indulgent as it sounds, given that Micah keeps a kosher diet, has limited opportunities to buy food, and simply doesn't get enough to eat in the kosher dining program. He's still lifting weights, and it takes a lot of protein to fuel that muscle mass.

He seems to be adjusting well to life at UF, but then, I haven't seen the first semester's grades. He's taken an interest in various campus organizations, including NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) and the Hillel Jewish Student Center. An interesting mix, but that's Micah.

Raphi is beginning to think about life after graduation in May, and has mentioned "Teach for America" as one possibility. This is similar to the old VISTA program—you sign up for a two year hitch and teach in inner-city schools. The program is looking for people with all kinds of degrees, not just education majors, and apparently it's both competitive and prestigious. Grad schools look well on applicants who've been through the TFA program, and will accept and defer enrollment for qualified applicants.

He's also looking at relocating to DC, which makes sense with his economics/politics major, and applied for a few fellowships.



## Mailing Comments, SFPA 246

**Lillian**—I was waiting for your report on Katrina, knowing you had friends at risk. I was saddened to read about Cindy, and I hope it brings you comfort to remember the good times you shared and how you helped her with her difficult life. My former rabbi and still good friend is from New Orleans, and he said the psychological impact on those who no longer live at home has also been devastating. "My childhood was destroyed," he said. //ct. me: Yes, you may quote my comments on Terry Schiavo in Challenger. Interestingly, it was the rallying cry at a local Democrat events. Who do you want deciding your end of life issues? You, your family and your doctors...or the government?///###

**Schlosser**—You and Kay still haven't sent me your check for trying to pass your kid off to the Robe clan. I thought we had a deal.//Parts of "The Cave" were filmed locally using experienced cave divers from the High Springs area. The movie premiered at the one theater in High Springs and was a big event for that tiny town. I haven't seen it yet, but because I know some of the folks involved I do plan to rent it.// Re: Random and cooking: The top items students take to school for cooking are microwaves, toaster ovens, George Foreman grills and slow cookers. With those four things they can keep themselves from starving.///###



**Copeland, J**—Re: SF being prepared for its own disasters: This is one of the things that really griped my butt after Hurricane Wilma. I have more sympathy for the victims of Katrina—I think they were shafted by an unprepared local government. But with Wilma, we live in Florida for cryin’ out loud. Every May all the grocery stores, all the schools, all the newspapers, the malls, they start pushing hurricane preparedness. We had a tax holiday specifically so people could stock up on hurricane supplies. It was heavily advertised. Everyone knew about it. So when storm season came, I had, long before Katrina hit New Orleans, bottles of water on hand—enough for three days for three adults—plenty of batteries, lamp oil, bags of ice in my back freezer (a freezer that’s full will act as an ice box for at least 48 hours if you don’t open the door), and before each storm would fill the car with gas. Of course, I also knew how to hunker down—fill the tubs with water for washing and flushing, use the camp stove, keep the tarp handy for the roof, etc.

So, when I saw people lined up for water in South Florida within 24 hours after the storm hit, I had to ask myself why they were so bare of supplies? And these were not homeless people and most were not too poor to buy \$.78 gallon bottles of water at Publix. Too often, people I talked to in South Florida who were caught unawares said “I didn’t think it would be like this.” Failure to plan is planning to fail, and it takes valuable resources and effort away from those who really need it, the homeless and the elderly and the shut-ins who were dying because they didn’t have electricity to power their medical equipment or keep insulin chilled.

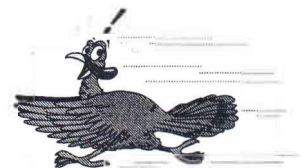
I think everyone in Florida should be required to read Pat Frank’s *Alas, Babylon*, which while it was about a nuclear war can still teach us a lot about preparing for natural disasters.//

The cartoon from *Strange Brew* with “Levitra” and “Cialis” is especially funny if you’ve read *Freakonomics*, a strange but entertaining tome similar to *The Tipping Point*.//

Ct. Me: When I booked my flight to Boskone this year my travel agent wanted me to fly Northwest for the best rate—they recently came into the Gainesville airport—but I only agreed after I checked and found there was a NW lounge in Boston and in Memphis, our hub. My Boskone flight has been two out of three for my being stranded, and being stranded in the Charlotte airport without US Air offering club facilities isn’t fun. If I’m going to have a weather delay, I want an open bar and a comfortable place to sit with my computer.////###

**Brown**—I trust your life post-Wilma is returning to what passes for normal.//Regarding your air conditioning leak, one of the devices I had installed the last time we repaired the unit was a backflow shut off safety. What happens is if the line gets blocked and water starts to back up, instead of flooding the area around the AC, usually days before one finds the problem exists, the backflow safety is triggered and the unit shuts down. It cost me an additional \$25, but it was worth it for the peace of mind.////###

And that’s all for this Disty. Happy Thanksgiving, see y’all next issue.



Eve