

Home with the Armadillo #58 is brought to you by Liz Copeland of 3243 165th Ave. SE, Bellevue WA 98008. Phone number is 425-641-0209. Email is received at lizc@nwlinc.com. Started in April 2003, for SFFA 233.

I went in for my hysterectomy on April 24, a Wednesday. I left the hospital on Saturday and came home to sleep. They really do wake you every three hours to take pain pills and I never get restful sleep in the hospital. I spent the next two weeks reading books and occasionally playing mahjong with the fannish girls. It was very restful, especially since I didn't have any tubes sticking out of my back. It's now May 30, and I am almost fully recovered. I'm taking long walks, climbing stairs with no problems, fixing dinner and even doing light gardening. And I feel so much better than I did last October that I don't even know how to describe it. I expect I'll feel like an entirely different person in a couple of months. And I'm looking forward to it.

I didn't comment on the war last time. And I'm still ambivalent enough that I don't really want to comment this time, but I couldn't resist this bit from one of Molly's columns. Maybe we should suggest that all Alaskans donate their annual oil bonus?

Molly Ivins (4-08-03):

Meanwhile, back at the ranch ... Sen. Ted Stevens suggested last week that New York City's cops and firefighters should work overtime without pay as a wartime sacrifice. "I really feel strongly that we ought to find some way to convince the people that there ought to be some volunteerism at home. Those people overseas in the desert -- they're not getting overtime. ... I don't know why the people working for the cities and counties ought to be paid overtime when they're responding to matters of national security."

Stevens, R-Alaska, had just voted for tax cuts that will give those who make a million dollars a year \$92,000 more to spend on polo ponies. Some must sacrifice more than others.

My garden is progressing nicely. I found a good gardener and had him rip out the grass on the slope in the backyard and mulch that area in. This means that Jeff can cut the

grass now as all the grassy areas are flat or almost flat and I can plant bushes and such in the back next year so as to bring in lots of birds. (More about birds later.) I planted 5 more rose bushes in the front, along with the new heathers, etc. Some of the calla lilies are coming up and they should bloom by next mailing. Some of the other stuff I planted hasn't come up yet which is disappointing but I'll keep my fingers crossed and hope it sprouts this next month. Otherwise I have even more space to fill in this next month.

So now I'm thinking about attracting birds when I plan my garden. This is because Tina has taken me on several bird trips and I've got the birder fever. This spring is a great time to explore the local parks and see the birds while they're in their breeding plumage. I'm enjoying learning the birds, having leisurely walks, and meeting other birders. Although I'm not sure I really have time for 3 time intensive hobbies. We'll see how it goes.

Books, Books & More Books

Med Ship/Murray Leinster

Toni sent me a couple of books for my recovery reading and I appreciated this one even tho I read it before my latest surgery. It's a reprint collection of stories from the late 50's and early 60's. The afterword by the editor talks about Leinster setting the parameters of science fiction and starting the subgenre of science fiction doctor stories. It's an interesting set of stories that I felt were clearly from that era. His doctor protagonist is a rational man who anticipates events almost perfectly, is always right and fulfills his mission perfectly. Don't get me wrong; they're good stories. But they are definitely stories from the 50s-60s.

A Hymn before Battle/John Ringo

Another gift from Toni. Another take on an alien federation enlisting humans to do their fighting for them against an invading force. I found it a lot like David Weber's first Honor Harrington book – lots of digressions about the science or keen toys distracted from the story. But I like the way Publisher's Weekly put it (although they were writing about the second book): "Ringo's characters often walk a fine line between heroic and stereotypical, while his extended expository passages slow the story." I enjoyed his main character and the battle with the aliens in the last third of the book was excellent. But I'll be getting the second book (and possibly the third) from the library to see if he sharpens his story telling skills.

The Best Alternate History Stories of the 20th Century/Turtledove I read this one while I was in the hospital under the influence of drugs; I have no idea if that influenced my opinion or not. I thought it was a good selection of interesting stories. Only one story, "The Winterberry", disappointed me.

A Woman's Liberation/Willis The subtitle on this anthology is a bit misleading -- A choice of futures by and about women -- is actually not all future earth stories. But they are all stories about individual liberation. If Allie weren't so busy ending her senior year, I'd try to get her to read this.

The Cobweb/Stephen Bury This is a political (sort of), thriller (sort of), set in 1990 that explains why Saddam Hussein thought he could invade Kuwait and get away with it. And why he didn't. Maybe it's alternate history, maybe not. But Bury is good at setting a scene and showing the essence of his characters. I don't want to say more and chance ruining the experience. I highly recommend this one. (If I remember correctly, the last book I highly recommended was *Curse of Chalion* by Bujold. Which was nominated for the Hugos, I believe.)

Puppet Master/John Dalmás This is two novellas and a short novel in one book, all featuring the same main character. He's a detective in an alternate Los Angeles where psychic powers exist, and a clean form of energy has been discovered. I was interested although I did find a few nits to pick. Just how many people died in the two plagues in the 1990's that the detective and his wife could vacation in Yosemite 3 weeks after deciding to do it? (Hint: you have to sign up for a permit over a year in advance nowadays.) But other than that, it was a fun read.

When the Devil Dances & Gust Front/John Ringo Ringo's strengths continue in these 2 books. He creates interesting battles and describes them in fascinating detail, with interesting soldiers & civilian warriors fighting the invading aliens. He also dwells on the weapons being used, which I don't find particularly fascinating but I know interests some people. What I cannot stand is the overall structure, which doesn't really exist. Each of these two books is a continuation of the war that started with the first book, but neither of them really has a novel's structure. Meaning there's no beginning, middle and end of a story. He does usually group it around a specific battle or battle area but I don't get a feeling of overall progress. And I don't particularly find the continuing story of earth being overrun by aliens and the earth forces fighting a losing battle that fascinating in and of itself. I'd like for this to be part of a bigger, more complex story. What makes it really annoying is that there are two or three hints about the existence of the bigger story dropped in each book but they're only hints. At this rate, it will take another 6 books before we get a framework of that bigger story. This would

be okay if it was a television series (think Babylon 5) but these are 500 page novels and I really don't want to wait 3 to 6 years to have my questions answered. I was hoping that Ringo would learn focusing and structure from working with David Weber, but it doesn't seem to have happened. This is disappointing because I do find the detailed battles engrossing but not the books as a whole.

Stating the Obvious
[The New York Times]
May 27, 2003

By PAUL KRUGMAN

"The lunatics are now in charge of the asylum." So wrote the normally staid Financial Times, traditionally the voice of solid British business opinion, when surveying last week's tax bill. Indeed, the legislation is doubly absurd: the gimmicks used to make an \$800-billion-plus tax cut carry an official price tag of only \$320 billion are a joke, yet the cost without the gimmicks is so large that the nation can't possibly afford it while keeping its other promises.

But then maybe that's the point. The Financial Times suggests that "more extreme Republicans" actually want a fiscal train wreck: "Proposing to slash federal spending, particularly on social programs, is a tricky electoral proposition, but a fiscal crisis offers the tantalizing prospect of forcing such cuts through the back door."

Good for The Financial Times. It seems that stating the obvious has now, finally, become respectable.

It's no secret that right-wing ideologues want to abolish programs Americans take for granted. But not long ago, to suggest that the Bush administration's policies might actually be driven by those ideologues — that the administration was deliberately setting the country up for a fiscal crisis in which popular social programs could be sharply cut — was to be accused of spouting conspiracy theories.

Yet by pushing through another huge tax cut in the face of record deficits, the administration clearly demonstrates either that it is completely feckless, or that it actually wants a fiscal crisis. (Or maybe both.)

Here's one way to look at the situation: Although you wouldn't know it from the rhetoric, federal taxes are already historically low as a share of G.D.P. Once the new round of cuts takes effect, federal taxes will be lower than their average during the Eisenhower administration. How, then, can the government pay for Medicare and Medicaid — which didn't exist in the 1950's — and Social Security, which will become far more expensive as the population ages? (Defense spending has fallen compared with the economy, but not that much, and it's on the rise again.)

The answer is that it can't. The government can borrow to make up the difference as long as investors remain in denial, unable to believe that the world's only superpower is turning into a banana republic. But at some point bond markets will balk — they won't lend money to a government, even that of the United States, if that government's debt is growing faster than its revenues and there is no plausible story about how the budget will eventually come under control.

At that point, either taxes will go up again, or programs that have become fundamental to the American way of life will be gutted. We can be sure that the right will do whatever it takes to preserve the Bush tax cuts — right now the administration is even skimping on homeland security to save a few dollars here and there. But balancing the books without tax increases will require deep cuts where the money is: that is, in Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security.

The pain of these benefit cuts will fall on the middle class and the poor, while the tax cuts overwhelmingly favor the rich. For example, the tax cut passed last week will raise the after-tax income of most people by less than 1 percent — not nearly enough to compensate them for the loss of benefits. But people with incomes over \$1 million per year will, on average, see their after-tax income rise 4.4 percent.

The Financial Times suggests this is deliberate (and I agree): "For them," it says of those extreme Republicans, "undermining the multilateral international order is not enough; long-held views on income distribution also require radical revision."

How can this be happening? Most people, even most liberals, are complacent. They don't realize how dire the fiscal outlook really is, and they don't read what the ideologues write. They imagine that the Bush administration, like the Reagan administration, will modify our system only at the edges, that it won't destroy the social safety net built up over the past 70 years.

But the people now running America aren't conservatives: they're radicals who want to do away with the social and economic system we have, and the fiscal crisis they are concocting may give them the excuse they need. The Financial Times, it seems, now understands what's going on, but when will the public wake up?

The bacover is a nice picture of a wood duck. We saw one at Marymoor Park in Redmond and I have to say that the picture doesn't quite do the duck justice. He's gorgeous and very colorful.

And that's it for this time; I hope you all have a nice couple of months, and see ya in sixty..

