

TENNESSEE TRASH #46

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ONE CONVENTION, TWO PASSES THROUGH AIRPORT SECURITY, THREE COUNTRIES VISITED, AND OTHER SEQUENCES...

Wow! The last two months have been so busy they seem more like six months than 60 days. I usually try to not travel in the weeks just before and after Concave so that I can concentrate on running the convention. I didn't have that luxury this year. Just my luck there were industry conferences scheduled for the last week in January and the first week of March, and both were command performances for me! Luckily, Naomi Fisher has assumed most of the responsibility for hotel arrangements for the convention, so I was able to foist a lot of the work on to her. It is also fortunate that we made our change in venue last year so that a lot of the troubleshooting for the convention was behind us. Nevertheless, the stress of preparing for two international trips separated by five weeks plus preparing for the convention made for some interesting juggling acts and midnight oil being burned.

THE FLU IN PERU LANDS MAINLY ON YOU

My first international jaunt was to a paint industry seminar that was hosted by Eastman's distributor in Peru, Quimica Anders. Since the Andean market is rather small and fragmented, there is no trade organization that puts together seminars in the area. Nevertheless, the customers are interested in seeing what their suppliers have to tell them, so a mini convention makes sense for all concerned. For my part, I can talk to all the customers at once without having to travel all over Peru and Bolivia, and

since all the attendees share a common supplier in Quimica Anders they can arrange a meeting that is large enough to justify the trip.

I had known that this meeting was planned since October, so I had plenty of time to prepare for it. Also, I was not expected to present a research paper for this meeting, only a review of the pertinent products for the area. Even though I did not have to write a formal paper or do any lab work to prepare for this meeting, I did try to modify my standard road show presentation with some new ideas and highlight some of the newly introduced products. I actually put together three PowerPoint presentations for the product line I support. I finished those back in November, and my only problem in January was to discover where I had stored them on my computer!

These days, my definition of a good trip to Latin America is any trip that does not go through Miami. Luckily Delta has direct service to Lima from Atlanta. That meant that I only had to change planes in Atlanta to make the trip. All the "increased" airport security does not make a big difference for me at Tri-Cities International. There are distinct advantages to living in a small town, and a small airport is one of them. My connection in Atlanta was more than an hour, and the flight to Lima was at most 40% full. I had three seats to myself. Too bad this was only a four-hour flight. I had a big book to read, so the flight passed quickly. I arrived in Lima at about 10:30 p.m. and passed through customs and immigration smoothly. This has been a problem in the past, but they have upgraded the immigration checkpoint since

my last visit with twice as many inspectors as I remember from my last visit, plus there were fewer people traveling to boot. Once through customs, I emerged into the arrival area to meet the driver that Quimica Anders had arranged for me. Right.

I had a bad feeling when there was no guy there with a placard with my name on it. I took three passes through the crowd just to be certain, but there was nobody there to meet me. No problem, I thought, I'll just look in my computer for the name of the hotel and I'll be off. Right.

Since Anders had made all the reservations for me, there was nothing on my itinerary that said where I was saying. I had an archived e-mail message from Anders that gave hotel information. That note was faithfully stored on the company server, and I couldn't get to it without going on-line. At midnight. In the Lima airport. Right.

I ended up picking a cab driver and asking him to take me to a hotel in the Miraflores district of the city that was at least in the right part of town. He did take me to a decent hotel where I was able to get some sleep and more importantly, an Internet connection. The next morning, I connected long enough to bring up the critical message and call the hotel to let my companions know that I had at least arrived. I then checked out of the one hotel and checked in to the right one. Since they were sold out, and they had held the room for me, they charged me for the room night. I suppose that was only fair, and I just had to explain why I paid for two rooms on the same night. Luckily hotels in Lima are not very expensive, so even with a double charge it didn't look too bad on my expense statement.

I arrived at the Miraflores Park Hotel in time to meet my colleagues and join them on the customer calls that had been planned for the day before the seminar was starting. I've had quite a few interesting things happen on customer visits before, and I thought I had seen it all, but I was surprised by what happened when we arrived at the second customer we met that day. The technical director met us and showed us into his office. Before we could say anything, he announced

that the management had just told them that morning that the Peruvian plant was being closed, and that he was out of a job. That sort of put a damper on the conversation.

That evening I finally got to see the room I ended up with at the hotel. Since they were sold out, I got one of the deluxe rooms that had been saved back in hopes of renting it for big bucks. My room opened on to a garden with a spacious yard. I was able to use it to practice Taekwando forms, so I was a happy camper.

The next morning, I was the second speaker on the program. They had put all the Spanish speakers on the first day of the meeting so that they only needed translators on the last day. Since I didn't need a translator and the Eastman product line is the most important one for Quimica Anders, I got the best time slot. My presentations went well, and I was happy to see that I was the only speaker of the day that got questions at the end. Once I finished speaking, I got a line of people with specific questions that kept me busy right through lunch. Once I had made my performance and answered all the questions, I could relax for the rest of the meeting.

There was no group dinner planned that evening, so Alex Vieira and I took the opportunity to go to a restaurant that specialized in Peruvian cuisine and live Peruvian music. The music was a lot of fun. The band consisted of three instrumentalists and six dancers. The players were very interesting to watch as they played guitar, pan pipes, and various percussion instruments. I was impressed enough to buy a CD at the end of the show.

The next day was Friday, and Alex and I had the flight to Sao Paulo to look forward to. The connections between Peru and Brazil are very limited, and as far as we knew there was only one direct flight that departed at 10:30 p.m. and arrived in Sao Paulo at 6:00 a.m. the next morning. Once the presentations were over, Quimica Anders provided a cocktail reception on the roof of the hotel. It was very nice to stand on top of a 12-story building and watch the sunset over the Pacific while the waves crashed on the beach. We could have stayed longer, but Alex and I

had other plans. My favorite restaurant in the world is *Astrid y Gaston* in Lima, and Alex and I figured that we had just enough time for a quick dinner and then a dash to the airport to catch the plane. Right.

The dinner was, as always, superb and I suppose that it was worth it that we got stuck in Friday night traffic and arrived 5 minutes after they had closed the check-in for the flight. Furthermore, it did not look promising to get on the next night's flight either. Evidently late January is high season for the Peruvian beaches, and everyone and his dog was returning to Brazil from a week of surfing. Alex and I had to beat it back into the city and find yet another hotel and regroup in the morning.

Luckily, we chose the Suissehotel to crash in because they had an excellent business center complete with a travel agent. We discovered that there was a Lan Peru flight from Lima to Sao Paulo that evening that had available seating. The bad news was that they would not accept our Varig tickets, so we had to buy a second ticket for the same route. (Do I notice a trend here?) That plane departed at 9:30 p.m. and arrived at 5 in the morning. (If you are wondering why the flight took so long, get out a map of South America. We were crossing almost the widest part of the continent, and three time zones to boot! This is one of the flights in the whole region where jet lag is a factor.)

That left us with a day to explore around Lima. There was an Incan pyramid only two blocks away from the hotel, so we killed a couple of hours examining the ruins and the rest of the time stuffing ourselves with Peruvian seafood. We arrived at the airport three hours before the flight this time, and had no trouble checking in. With the wait I was able to buy a couple bottles of *pisco* a potent Peruvian grape liquor that is used to make a leg bone-melting cocktail called a *pisco sour*. I am looking forward to learning how to make it at home.

The flight from Lima to Sao Paulo has all the charm of an L.A. to New York red-eye. We were in the air for four hours. I never managed to go to sleep for any of it. Dawn was breaking as we arrived in Brazil, so we

had to pass zombie-like through health, immigration, and customs. Brazil requires that any travelers from tropical South American countries have proof of Yellow Fever vaccination. That is reasonable, and expected, except that they had one little old lady there at 5 a.m. to check everyone's vaccination records. That took 45 minutes. The rest of the passage through Official Territory took 15 minutes. Suffice it to say that I was not feeling my best when I finally checked into my fourth hotel on the trip.

The next day I had a full slate of customer calls to make. I thought that it was taking a long time to get over the red-eye flight from Lima. By the end of the day, I had to admit that it was quite a bit worse than that. As I developed a throbbing headache, hacking cough, joint pains, and chills I had to admit that I had contracted the flu on the road. I was luck the next day because the Brazilian office had gotten a last-minute warning that several Eastman execs were dropping in to visit. The sales reps had to cancel our calls for that day, and I was supposed to spend the day with our distributor giving them training and answering questions. By that morning it was apparent that I was not in any shape for human contact. I apologized to the distributor and collapsed into bed.

I don't remember much of the rest of that week. I did dope myself up with enough acetaminophen to function for short stretches. Luckily making calls in Sao Paulo means slogging through traffic for two hours between each appointment, so I was able to zonk out in the car enough to make it through the calls. By Friday evening I was feeling a bit better and was quite ready to dump myself onto a plane home. I have had to cope with many variations of Montezuma's Revenge in my travels, but this was a whole new level of No Fun At All.

THE GLAMOUR OF RUNNING A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

Flu or no, once I returned home, I had to kick into high convention-planning gear. Naomi was handling the hotel reservations, but I still had to attend to all the little details that go into preparation for Concave. I needed to assemble the program book for one thing.

That is usually mostly handled by Gary Williams. Unfortunately, when I contacted him to see if he had done the artwork and layout for the book yet, he was also flat on his back with the flu.

Since I couldn't do the program, I settled for doing the hundred other little boring jobs that needed doing while I waited for Gary to recover enough to pick up a pen again. On top of that, I had to prepare for my trip to Ecuador the week after the convention. This required a presentation built from scratch since it was based on a research project and was data that had never been presented publicly before. I had already submitted the article for the convention notes back in January, so I had most of the translation done.

I ran into a bit of luck when I mentioned to Naomi in one of our nightly consultations that I was having trouble locating a refrigerator for us to use. Among the downsides of our new location is that the hotel does not have enough tables and chairs for our needs and does not have the spacious kitchen/bar facilities that we were spoiled with at the Park Mammoth Resort. Last year the only place I could find that could get us a refrigerator for the weekend was a rent-to-own rip off place that charged me a month's rent for three days use. When Naomi found out that I was on the verge of doing the same this year, she launched into action. What she discovered was that there is an office supply store in Horse Cave that could not only supply us with tables and chairs, but also a refrigerator. When I got a price quote from them, I could get everything I needed for less than I paid last year for just the table and chair rental.

By the time I had all of this mundane stuff done Gary Williams had recovered enough to do the program book art. Bill Francis thoughtfully already had a biographical article and picture posted on the SFC website, so I was able to scarf that. The rest of the book was mostly the same as last year with a few updates, so I was able to finish the layout in one weekend. The local printer didn't flinch when I said I needed the job done in two days, and wonder of wonders, they did have it ready on time!

On Wednesday, February 20 we loaded up both our vehicles and headed for Horse Cave. We were able to leave earlier this year than usual because Corlis' classes are over by noon this year. The trip across backwater Tennessee and Kentucky was uneventful until we stopped for cheap gas in Glasgow, KY about 15 miles short of our destination. When Corlis got out of the van, she had a suspiciously pallid look. I asked her if she was all right, and she asked if we had a thermometer in our supplies. We didn't but the K-mart across the street did. 101.7°. It took a bit of incubation, but she had the Brazilian Creeping Crud. This is decidedly Not A Good Thing when we both had a convention to run that weekend.

Corlis poured into bed as I unpacked the vehicles and entertained the boys in the hotel pool. The next morning her fever was down enough that she could take the kids to my parent's house for the duration. She lasted long enough to help load up supplies from storage at Annette Carrico's house and then return to the hotel. I pointed her back to bed for the rest of the day.

By the time we returned with all the gear from Bowling Green, others were already starting to arrive. I gratifyingly good-sized crowd was there to help with the unloading and set up, so I mostly had to point at things that needed doing and then run for another round of shopping. By late afternoon we had the setup done except for the art show, and I could relax a bit. Bill Francis and Many Stephenson arrived at about 6 p.m. so we had cold beer and sodas, munchies, and a guest of honor for the convention. What else did we need?

The next morning Corlis' fever had abated to a trace, so she was thankfully up to the task of setting up the registration table and processing people in as they arrived. She didn't move from her spot a lot that day, but she was at least functional. At least she had a constant stream of people sitting with her to keep her company when registration was slow, or she needed an extra hand when things got busy.

I mostly had fun setting up the consuite and visiting with people as they came in for the

first beer of the weekend. The sound of a beer can being popped open just for you in a consuite is a sacred sound. I took the first round of bartending just so I could preside over that moment many times over. I never had time for lunch that day, and dinner was a non-issue since Naomi was cooking that night.

We were also helped in the consuite by Annette Carrico's return to full-time duty. Last year Annette was undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer and was obviously not operating at full strength. This year her treatment is over, and she seems to be completely recovered from both the cancer and her treatment.

Last year the hotel maintenance man turned out to be a closet SF fan and wanted to join in the fun. This year, a new guy had taken over. I don't think that John had ever cracked a SF book in his life, but he did know a party when he saw one. After his shift was over, he returned with his girlfriend to join in the festivities. It pays to make nice to your hotel staff.

Another prominent hotel staff member who joined in the fun was Theresa Threadgill, the general manager of the hotel. She had dressed in costume all day and was ready to party as soon as the clock struck 5. In 19 years of dealing with the Park Mammoth Resort, I doubt that more than a dozen of our conventioners knew the manager, Diane Stewart. I also doubt that there aren't many of the Concave regulars who *don't* know Theresa by now. She is one of the few Hampton Inn managers in the district who can boast that she sells out her property to a convention. That doesn't fit the Hampton Inn business model, but that doesn't stop Theresa from taking advantage of an opportunity! What a difference after so many years of sour treatment at The Other Place. Just as icing on the cake, we discovered that the Park Mammoth Resort was closed this year until March 1. It is just sweet justice that they couldn't stay open year-round without us.

Right on cue, Naomi's party opened up on Friday night complete with everything from chili to chocolate cheesecake. When I

arrived, Naomi was discovering that the stuffed mushrooms that she had preserved with dry ice had not thawed at all. I whipped out my Gerber multi-tool and began separating the rock-hard fungi. It is surprising just how hard a mushroom gets at subzero temperatures.

I also took the opportunity to tour the art show. It looked a bit thin this year. This was a bit of a puzzle because Concave has a good reputation for not only selling art but also paying the artists right away after the sale. We had only about a third of the mail-in art we usually have, but what we did have was pretty good quality. I assured Pat and Naomi that a slow year for the art show would not be a problem. We needn't have worried. We ended up selling over \$4000 worth of art. It was also gratifying to see that most of the sales went to area artists who brought work into the show instead of mailing it. I do like to support the local talent.

The main event of Saturday was the Banquet at the Bookstore. I remember years where the breakeven point for the convention rode on selling enough banquet tickets to satisfy the hotel that we had fulfilled our obligation for a food function so that the function space was comped for the weekend. Now, the hotel could care less about how many tickets we sell because it has no associated restaurant. Just to demonstrate the perversity of the universe, the Concave banquet at the Bookstore Café is so popular that all the tickets sold out on Friday evening, and we could have probably sold 20 more if there was seating at the restaurant.

Once again Horse Cave sent a representative to officially welcome us to the area and to thank us for coming and spending money there in the off season. This was the only seated meal I got between Thursday and Sunday. After the banquet we had a few hours to prepare for the art auction.

The unveiling of the newest addition to my gaudy shirt collection marks the start of the art auction. This year the shirt was a Pinky and the Brain in Outer Space theme. Even though the show was small, there were a few big-ticket items that went to auction. The audience was also slow to bid, but that didn't

stop them from bidding. The auctioneers had to work hard for every advance, but in the end all but six out of 90 pieces got advances over the minimum. I was surprised when a few pieces went over \$100 and higher. We try to move a piece a minute. We didn't make that rate this year, but we did sell a lot of art.

After the art auction came the two events most people were waiting for all day. These were Frank and Millie Kaliz's Xerps in 2010 Worldcon bid party, and their new rival, Jeff and Lisa Lockridge's North Pole in 2010 Worldcon bid party. Jeff and Lisa had the best spread and the most clever decorations (They wrapped the hotel pictures with Christmas paper for example), and the cleverest gimmick. Jeff had posted a sign on the door where you could sign up for either the Nice List or the Naughty List. If you went for the Nice List, you were automatically accepted. If you chose the Naughty List, you had to show up when they barred the door at 1 a.m. and audition.

For all the that good clean fun, the most action was on the third floor. The North Pole Bid was clever, but the Xerpes in 2010 had a Jacuzzi. I'm not sure when that became clothing optional, but it stayed that way for most of the night. That party actually got out of hand for the hosts when one couple became rather too affectionate on the bed in one of the rooms. It was amusing how many people came up to me and Naomi the next morning to tattle on the Xerpes party only to ask if they could have the Jacuzzi suite next year to protect us from such depravity! Right.

On Sunday morning nobody was in a hurry to leave since the hotel expended the checkout time to 3 p.m. I have often futilely argued with hotel managers that there is no way they will need all the rooms cleaned for occupancy on Sunday night. Why should they insist on everyone checking out at noon? That made perfect sense to Theresa, and once she had enough rooms cleaned to cover her reservations plus a safety margin, she didn't really care when anyone else left. That actually worked to her advantage when several Concave members decided to stay another night.

Since there was no mass exodus, the worst part of the convention, teardown, was done literally before I knew it. Volunteers had taken down the art show displays and had packed up the consuite equipment that went into storage without even asking if there was anything that needed to be done. I was able to accompany Annette and some others back to Bowling Green, put the stuff into the attic and return to the hotel before sunset! That was a first.

Even at 7 p.m. there was still a sizable crowd to partake in the traditional dead dog pizza feast catered by the Radio Shack Pizza Hut across the street from the hotel. (I'm not making this up!) After unwinding with pizza and beer we made for the pool for one last Jacuzzi before turning in.

The next morning was sunny but cold. Corlis had sufficiently recovered from the flu to make it home. The only disappointment of the trip was the discovery that our favorite diner, The Rockin' Robin Café, in Somerset Kentucky had gone to that Great Deep Fat Fryer In The Sky.

JOURNEY TO THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD

I was looking forward to my trip to Ecuador for several reasons. The best thing about the trip was its brevity. Since there was nothing for me to do there except give my paper at the paint seminar, the trip was only four days. Visiting Guayaquil also let me put another notch in my passport since Ecuador was one of the few South American countries I had not yet visited. With the completion of this trip, I have only Paraguay, Guiana, French Guiana, and Suriname to visit on the continent. I will probably make it to Paraguay sometime, but the little countries on the north coast may be a bit more of a problem. The trip did not start out auspiciously since I nearly blew it before I even left home.

I suppose that I've gotten too casual about travel for my own good. I find it difficult to get very excited about exactly when a particular flight departs or arrives until I'm on the way to the airport. When Corlis asks when I'm leaving, I'll usually infuriate her by

answering “Wednesday” when she wants a flight number and a to-the-minute departure time.

Thanks to the wonders of electronic ticketing, I no longer have printed tickets to keep straight. All I have now is a receipt stapled to an itinerary sheet. I generally stuff these in the outer pocket of my laptop bag so I know where they are. On this particular day I had the itineraries for two trips in there. One for the trip to Ecuador and another for the trip I’ll be making to Seattle in May. I was not paying attention when I pulled out an itinerary to check on when the cab was supposed to pick me up. The paper I grabbed said 11 a.m., so I waited patiently until 11:05 before checking the paper again.

I realized with horror that I was looking at the itinerary for the May trip. Somehow, I had not requested a pick-up for this trip, and the plane I was supposed to be on left at 10:40! I threw my luggage in the car and broke the speed limit in getting to the airport. I huffed up the USAirways counter and asked the nice lady if there was any way I could still connect to my 5 p.m. flight from Miami to Guayaquil.

As the travel gods decided to smile on me, she informed me that I could take the noon flight to Charlotte and still make my connecting flight to Miami. It turned out that when I reserved the flight the computer had decided that the layover in Charlotte for the noon flight was too short, so it put me on the 10:40! Miracle of miracles USDispairways was even running on-time that day, so after a quick call to Corlis to let her know that I had taken the car, I made it to Charlotte with 40 minutes to make my connection.

Unlike Lima, getting to Guayaquil is not possible from Atlanta. In this case I had to brave the Miami airport. This has to be one of the worst designed airports in the world. If you are arriving or departing in Miami it is great because the airport is divided into eight terminals so there is never much distance between your car and gate. If you are changing planes, however, it is a different story. In my case the flight from Charlotte arrived in Concourse H and the plane to Guayaquil was leaving from Concourse B. This meant that I had to hike all the way

across the sprawling Miami airport and, worst of all, pass through the security checkpoint again, to make my connection. I had three hours to make it, and I needed almost all of that time.

Did you see the recent reports that the Department of Transportation recently checked airport security and discovered that 70% of knives, 50% of simulated bombs and 30% of handguns passed through the checkpoints without raising an alarm! Why am I not surprised? As I have said before and will say again all the hoopla over increased airport security is as effective as a mouse fart. “Who packed your bags sir?” “Has anyone asked you to carry any suspicious items in your luggage?” Give me an effin break!

Once on my way to Ecuador, I was once again able to luxuriate in an almost empty plane. I scarfed up enough unused pillows and blankets to make myself a quite comfortable nest. I was about halfway through Webber and White’s *The Shiva Option*, A book I had been anticipating for several years, so I was a happy camper. (The book was satisfying as a sequel, but I feel that John Ringo has surpassed Webber and White in the enemy-from-hell-vs.-humanity sub-genre. I felt this book suffered from the foreknowledge that the good guys would eventually win whereas Ringo’s series still leaves room for doubt. Still, it was an excellent way to fill a day of sitting in airplanes.)

By the time the inflight movie came on I was ready for a break from reading. On my previous trip the inflight movie was *Rush Hour 2* on every leg, even the Lan Peru flight from Lima to Sao Paulo! As a Jackie Chan fan I’d already seen *RH2* twice, so I mostly tuned out the movie. This time, the film was *Zoolander* which was entertaining enough to keep me watching as I ate my generous American Airlines coach class dinner. I didn’t expect much from a film whose major premise is that male models are Really Stupid. There is a scene where Our Heroes are trying to get a file from a computer and can’t figure out how to turn it on. It was worth the price of admission when they started bashing the poor Apple with a bone

while *Also Sprach Zarathustra* played in the background.

Once in Guayaquil the immigration line moved slowly. The inspector was having to key in the information from the forms for each person passing through. There was a touch of humor as the immigration checkpoint was labeled *La Puerta A La Mitad del Mundo* - The Doorway to the Middle of the World. Ecuador is proud of their equator-straddling position. Once through customs, I saw my friend Cristian Ruiz waiting to escort me to the hotel.

Once at the Guayaquil Hilton, my expenditure of good travel karma that morning came back to haunt me. The hotel did not have a room for me. This infuriated Cristian because he had checked that afternoon to make sure that my reservation was in the system. Once again, I had not made my reservation directly since the convention organizers had supposedly taken care of them. After some digging in the computer, they discovered that Gary Rowe was supposed to have arrived the day before. They were at least nice about it and gave us some drink coupons while I waited for a room. That was actually fine with me because I was still keyed up from travel and my airplane dinner was long gone. They made me wait until after midnight to make sure that the room they had held back was not claimed.

Once again, I benefited by taking the last room in the hotel. This room had an attached greenhouse and balcony garden that once again permitted me to practice my forms. It was especially nice when the frequent rains drummed on the glass roof of the greenhouse.

The next morning, I had to prepare for giving my presentation. That meant politely sitting through the other presentations. I normally like doing that because it gives me an opportunity to pick up some new Spanish and to get presentation ideas from others. I was quite disappointed in these presentations. Most of the speakers were deadly dull and the presentations were not well produced. The flashiest one of the day was also probably the worst of the lot.

I love it when a competitor screws up, and this time it was DuPont's turn. Their presentation started with a video clip showing how they are leader in powder coating technology. This is a new technology trend that allows the application of paint without the use of liquid. The paint is applied as a fine dry powder that is sprayed onto an electrostatically charged surface. The paint then clings to the part like lint to socks. You then bake the part in an oven that melts the powder into an evenly distributed coating. It is an elegant solution that would be great if they could ever get it to work. The DuPont guy made a 90-minute presentation on powder coating technology that was really pretty but was completely inappropriate for their audience.

All of the people attending the conference were paint makers, and DuPont was touting their ability to make paint. This was a bit like letting Moses see the Promised Land. None of the people in the audience were at all interested in buying or applying powder paint from DuPont. They might have been interested in seeing how to make the paint, but that was not what was presented.

My paper, however, was a different story. Mine was loaded with formulas and test procedures and performance data. Sure, it was aimed at selling more of Eastman stuff, but it was just what my audience wanted to hear about. Before I was five slides into my talk some of the audience began to ask questions. Instead of a droning lecture my presentation turned into a panel discussion that was fun for both the audience and me. It was a good thing that I was in the last time slot of the day because the questions kept coming until they finally chased us out of the room. In the end I don't know if I convinced any of my listeners to buy cellulose acetate butyrate, but I certainly made them think!

After my speech was over the local distributor rep, Luis Toledo, offered to give us a tour of Guayaquil. I had a specific mission in mind. Since this was my first time in Ecuador, I wanted to get a shirt from the Ecuadorian national soccer team. The whole country was somewhat soccer mad since their team made the cut for the World Cup for the first time ever. Because of that they have had a special

World Cup uniform designed so I was a good time to be interested in the team. Or it would have been if I was there a day or so later because the new style shirt was not being released to the public until the day I was leaving. Luis was coming to Kingsport for training in mid-March, so he offered to get me a shirt and deliver it in person.

The city of Guayaquil is not huge, only 1.5 million inhabitants, so it is not hard to see the sights in a short tour. The most interesting feature of the city is the Malecón. This is a mile-long park that has been made from the abandoned port on the Guayas River. (The port was moved 20 years ago 5 miles downstream to take advantage of deeper water.) The Malecón is composed of dykes, gardens, and old warehouses that have been converted into shops and restaurants. It's quite fashionable and trendy and quite attractive. Its completion marked the first success story of Ecuador's bold economic experiment.

A few years ago, Ecuador's economy was in ruins due to devalued currency and runaway inflation coupled with governmental corruption. When the government changed hands, Ecuador tried something new. They stopped printing their own money and adopted the US dollar as the national currency. Now, if Ecuador needs money, they have to find someone with dollars to invest in the country. This cured the inflationary spiral and stabilized the economy at the expense of many government jobs and services that they could no longer afford. Ecuador's neighbors in the Andian Pact, and not entirely with support are closely watching this move. For the time being, however, if you visit Ecuador, you do not have to visit the robber barons of the money exchanges!

Although I normally don't have luggage space, time, and energy for buying souvenirs I did make an exception on this trip. I found something in a gift shop that I just couldn't pass up. I species of palm grows in the Ecuadorian jungle that produces a golf ball sized coconut. This nut is special because when mature the white meat fills the entire nut. When the hull is stripped away, and the meat is exposed to the air an amazing transformation takes place. As a paint

chemist, I recognize the special properties of coconut oil. It is one of the common ingredients of oil-based paint because when exposed to air it "dries". Actually, the oil oxidizes and cures to form a hard material.

In this particular coconut there is just the right proportion of coco oil and vegetable fiber to form a hard ivory colored material that looks and feels just like ivory. They call this material "vegetable ivory" or by its local name, tagua. The Indians in the area have used taqua for centuries as an ornamental material. Nowadays most of the tagua is exported to the US where it is used as simulated ivory buttons. Some of the material, however, is carved into figures and sold to turistas like me. I couldn't resist buying a taqua chess set with figures carved in the shapes of Galapagos animals. Although this material is beautiful, it is limited in use because the tagua nuts are no more than 1 ½ inches across and the tree cannot be cultivated because it takes 25 years to mature. It does, however, make for a great souvenir of my trip to Ecuador.

The only flight available to take me back home in one day departed from Guayaquil at 9:30 a.m. The day after the seminar I had a couple of meetings in the morning, so I had to stay over Friday night and leave on Saturday. That gave me most of a day to myself to explore Guayaquil. Before leaving, however, the area Eastman sales rep, Cristian Ruiz, warned me not to wander through the city by myself. I did venture out to the craft market where I bought my chess set and a couple of fancy recorders for the boys. Luis Toledo, the local salesman did not have dinner plans, so I at least did not have to eat alone.

We had dinner in an excellent Italian restaurant that featured a ceiling with aquariums imbedded that gave the place an undersea feeling. I was not completely comfortable sitting under the tanks when I asked Luis if there were ever earthquakes in Quayaquil. "Oh yes, frequently!" he said looking at the ceiling, "I guess we're not sitting in a good place if we have one!" We got through the meal without problems. One interesting thing was that at one point Luis pointed out one of the fellow diners as the current President of the University of

Guayaquil and a highly likely candidate for President of the country in the next election. If he gets elected I can say that I had dinner with the President of Ecuador.

The next morning the depressing reality was that I needed to be at the airport at 6:30 for my 9:30 flight. Luckily the airport was only five minutes away from the hotel, so I didn't have to get up really early. When I arrived the line for the American counter stretched out into the airport parking lot! They were hand-inspecting all luggage to be checked in, so the line moved very slowly. I was pleased when it only took 1 ½ hours to get my boarding pass. After that there was another half-hour wait to clear the immigration checkpoint and another 45 minutes to pass through the one metal detector that served the whole airport!

Unlike the plane to Ecuador, the Miami bound flight was almost full. I was not able to nest nearly as comfortably on the return flight. By this time, I was well into Harry Turtledove's *Sentry Peak* (The Civil War transformed into a sword and sorcery fantasy) so I didn't much care what was going on around me. The Miami airport once again annoyed me. The International arrivals point will only check bags through if you are continuing on American, so I had to drag all my stuff to Concourse H and wait through the USAirways ticket counter line to re-check my suitcase. I was not in a great mood when I had to pass the security checkpoint.

I have special clothes that I wear when traveling now that have an absolute minimum of metal. The pants have plastic zippers and belt buckle, and my shoes do not have a metal sole support. I suppose that they decided I looked like a terrorist since I didn't trip the metal detector. I had to hand over my shoes for separate inspection. That wouldn't have been so bad except after waiting for five minutes in the chair that they sternly warned me not to leave I still had not gotten my shoes back! Luckily the plane to Charlotte was delayed for a half-hour so I didn't miss my connection.

NOTEWORTHY BOOKS AND MOVIES

Red Moon by Michael

Cassutt: While not exactly Science Fiction, this book should be read by anyone interested in space exploration and the human factors involved in managing the space program. Michael Cassutt is a well-known space writer as the author of the definitive *Who's Who in Space*. Using that authority as a nonfiction writer he draws the reader into a fictionalized story of what went wrong with the Soviet Space Program in the 1960's. He sets up the story by introducing himself as the reporter researching the Russian mishandling of the International Space Station who is directed toward an aging engineer named Yuri Ribko who knows the real story of the doomed Soviet moon landing project. Yuri agrees to meet Michael in a bar and over the course of several months relates the story. The intrigue starts when Michael speculates if the story is worth telling now and if anyone cares.

He wagged a finger at me. "The world would have been different if we had won. The same things that stopped us are stopping you, on ISS."

That single chilling line had me hooked from page five on.

It turns out that Yuri was well placed to watch the implosion of the Soviet Space Program. In 1966 he graduated from the U.S.S.R.'s most prestigious technical school while working as a gofer for Vasily Filin, one of the second-tier managers of the Experimental Design Bureau Number 1 headed by the legendary Sergi Korolov, the Russian Chief Designer. Yuri's father is a Hero of the Soviet Union and a general in the Soviet Air Force. His uncle Vladimir is a shadowy figure with a carefully undefined position in the KGB.

On a fateful January morning in 1966 Yuri is delivering some papers to his hospitalized mentor Filin when Korolov is admitted for some routine surgery. Coincidentally his father and Uncle Vladimir are also visiting the Kremlin Hospital that day. Accompanying the Great Man is none other than Yuri Gagarin. Something goes disastrously wrong on the operating table and Korolev dies. Young and idealistic, Yuri is selected by the suddenly elevated Filin to work in Bureau 1. He is also recruited by

Uncle Vladimir to spy on his boss and the goings on in Bureau 1, as his father tries to divert him into the army Cosmonaut training program.

Yuri is soon in up to his ears in the disarray of the Experimental Design Bureau after the death of Korolov. He also soon discovers that all is not well with the Bureau's work as he is recruited to test an ineptly designed early zero gee toilet on the Russian version of the Vomit Comet. His loyalties are torn as he is drawn deeper into Uncle Vladimir's intrigues while having to mislead his colleagues and liver Marina. He also learns that one of his roommates and classmate Lev has been recruited into the Experimental Design Bureau's rival agency, the ultrasecret Chelomi Bureau, and Yuri is expected to spy on that too.

From his privileged vantage point Yuri then watched over the few triumphs and many failures of the Soviet Space Program for the next five years. He sees rockets launch, Soyuz capsules land, and lots of things crash, explode and burn. He is also nearby when Yuri Gagarin dies in a mysterious plane crash. Almost against his will Yuri Ribko pieces together the threads of intrigue, sabotage, betrayal, power, mixed with flashes of scientific genius and pioneering spirit that mark the slow-motion wreck of the Soviet Space Program.

Red Moon moves fast, and covers a lot of technical ground without ever losing the inherent decency and idealism of its main character. Indeed, Yuri Ribko, his hyper-dysfunctional family, and the liberal use of historical figures and places make him and his story seem to rise above the level of fictional character. The book also makes me less anxious to ride a government designed spacecraft and increases my respect for those who do. Try and find this book. I think you will be glad you did.

The Time Machine

I had looked forward to this updating of H.G. Wells' classic directed by his grandson. I foolishly thought that descendant would have some respect for his ancestor's work. Alas, Simon Wells got the backing to make

granddad's vision into a Hollywood Special Effects Extravaganza.

The movie starts out well enough as The Time Traveler is given a name and a backstory to explain his obsession with time travel. The death of his girlfriend on the evening of their engagement sends Our Hero Alex into the lab for four years corresponding with Einstein and building a machine that will carry him back to the Fateful Night to save his beloved. The machine works fine, but Alex discovers to his horror that the past is impervious to change. Inconsolable, Alex ventures into the future to try and discover why the past is unchangeable. In one of his stops, he barely escapes when a moon colonization attempt succeeds in blowing up the moon and imperiling Life As We Know It. Unconscious, Alex sets the machine on Deep Fat Fry and wakes up 800,000 years in the future.

Here we pick up with the familiar Eloi and Morlocks. The Eloi are predictably beautiful and peaceful and even more predictable the one who rescues the delirious Alex is a Major Babe who, of course, speaks English. The symbiotic relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks of the book is lost in the movie. In the book the Morlocks provide food, clothing and shelter for the Eloi who in turn are the Morlock's food supply. In the movie, the Eloi are clothing-challenged Beautiful People who build graceful wicker cliff dwellings and the Morlocks are subterranean parasites. The heart of the book is the revulsion and horror of The Time Traveler when he realizes that no matter how repugnant the Eloi/Morlock cycle may be neither race can survive without the other.

The movie predictably ends when Our Hero manages to kill the head Morlock and then sacrifice his machine to make some sort of time explosion that dusts the Morlocks like vamps on Buffy thereby freeing the Eloi and Getting the Girl. Sorry Simon. Go back to directing cartoons.

Sentry Peak / Marching Through Peachtree - Harry Turtledove Once again Harry Turtledove finds another perspective from which to re-enact The War Between The States. His first crack at this was his best,

the classic *Guns of the South* in which time travelers change the course of the war by equipping The Confederacy with AK-47's. In this book Turtledove perfected his distinctive style of telling the story from three levels and several viewpoints. His second foray into Alternate Civil War Land, *How Few Remain* was a more traditional alternate history extrapolation with The Confederacy succeeding through a simple twist of fate. This has led to several sequels into a timeline where The U.S allies with Germany in The Great War and World War I is truly global. While entertaining, this series has gone on too long and has lost some of its appeal.

Now, Harry Turtledove has thrown out all the rules, and has re-cast The War of Northern Aggression in a sword-and-sorcery setting. Instead of muskets, rail lines, and telegraphs we have crossbows, flying carpet lines, and crystal balls. Instead of Lookout Mountain, Missionary Ridge and General Braxton Bragg we have Sentry's Peak, Proselytizer's Ridge, and General Thraxton the Braggart. Indeed, the Tuckerisms of the names and places are the most likable part of this series. Unlike the past books, Turtledove has chosen here to simply re-tell the story of the Civil War in East Tennessee and Northern Georgia by dressing the rebs in blue, turning the map upside down, and handing everyone a crossbow. The result made me want to read a straight history of these battles much more than the inevitable third book in this trilogy. I just hope that Turtledove quits with three books in this series and returns to more interesting territory like his Worldwar series.

AND THEN THINGS GOT WORSE

I wrote earlier that Isaac got the flu from Corlis and me in early March. It turns out now that that was not quite right. All month he has been suffering from sporadic joint pain and intermittent fever. We chalked this up to growing pains and lingering flu symptoms. Thank God last week we decided to take him back to the doctor when his symptoms were not improving after three weeks.

Last Friday afternoon, even though he was feeling good at the time, Corlis took him in to the pediatrician's office. His symptoms were

troubling enough from them to do some blood work. On Monday the doctor's office called with a message that we were to show up at 8 a.m. on Wednesday for more blood work and other tests.

The blood samples they took showed that Isaac was slightly anemic and that his sedimentation rate was a too high. Today they confirmed that he has rheumatic fever and that he has developed a heart murmur.

I am impressed that the doctor was able to make that diagnosis on so little evidence. With the exception of the heart murmur that didn't show up until today, his symptoms could have indicated about 30 different conditions. I knew that rheumatic fever was really a second-stage strep infection, but I thought that it only affected the heart. It turns out that it mainly manifests itself in the joints. It normally does not progress to the second stage because it is caught as strep throat at the onset of the infection. In Isaac's case he never developed a sore throat or rash that might have indicated the infection. The really scary part is that if we had not had taken action when we did the infection could have gone even farther.

Tomorrow we will be seeing a pediatric cardiologist for a consultation and echocardiogram. We will know then if there is any permanent heart damage done. For now he is taking two adult aspirin every eight hours for the inflammation and large doses of penicillin to fight off the infection. We have to go back on Friday for more blood work to make sure he is getting the right amount of aspirin and that the antibiotic is working.

Isaac is taking all of this remarkably well. He is getting accustomed to getting blood drawn, and thinks it is really cool that he is the only one in his class to have a cardiologist doctor. It turns out that the only pediatric cardiologist in the area has a son who took Corlis' statistics class last fall. She thinks she flunked him. I hope that's not a sign.