

TENNESSEE TRASH # 41

The Tennessee State Taekwondo Gyorooigi Gold Medallist*
is...Me!



Is that a scary thought or what?

*For the 40-45 year-old age group, 3rd-4th Gup (Blue/Red Stripe) Division





BEFORE



AFTER

Tennessee Trash #40 was produced over the God-sent Memorial Day weekend by Gary R. Robe. The mail still arrives at P. O. Box 3221, Kingsport, TN 37664 and the phone still rings at (423) 239-3106. The e-mail, however, now comes to grrobe@chartertn.net thanks to the installation of my spiffy new cable modem! The old address will still work for a while, but the new one is a whole lot faster for me! Yes, to those of you out there who are aware of such things, I have installed Norton Personal Firewall on my new system to keep out the bad guys.

TENNESSEE TRASH #41

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THE TAEKWANDO TOURNAMENT, ADVENTURES
WITH BRAZILIAN AIRLINES, CAIPIRINHAS FOR
EVERYONE AT DSC, AND OTHER OUT-OF-TOWN
EXPERIENCES...

OK, you can legitimately ask what business a 44 year-old ex-couch potato has in competing at a State Taekwondo Tournament. It's a bit like mountain climbing. Because I could. My advance to my current level blue belt is more than I would have predicted two years ago when I first started studying Taekwondo. During those first days in the beginner's class I looked at the upper level belt holders with a bit of awe and more than a bit of envy. As I got into the idea of kicking things hard and rapidly, I began to get a sense that I could indeed do this thing.

First I need to explain a bit about how Taekwondo is organized. The word Taekwondo is Korean for "the way of hand and foot" and did not exist until the mid-50's when American GI's were first exposed to Korean martial arts during the war. This was the first time that American and Asian troops really fought together closely enough to pick up bits of each other's cultures. The tradition of martial arts, however, goes back several thousand years. Each region had distinctive styles, each designed to exploit a weakness in an enemy's style. In those days, development of fighting styles was comparable to our Cold War arms race. Those who had the best-developed forms had a much better chance in battle. Until American troops started asking for training in Korean fighting methods, there was no real standardized "kwan" or "way" to practice the

arts. With the intermingling of American and Korean culture during the Korean War both groups saw an advantage in standardizing training so that large numbers of forces could be trained in a systematic way.

The idea of colored belts is completely an American invention. In the Asian tradition, a student started studying with a master and studied until the master decided that he had attained mastery. Americans aren't patient enough for that, so the idea of breaking down the progress into steps denoted with colored belts was introduced. To make black belt in Taekwondo one passes through ten levels called a *gup* in order to reach first *Dan* or mastery, designated by a black belt. Other styles of martial arts have adopted similar ranking systems for students although the words are different in other languages.

Although the formalization of Taekwondo is a recent invention, the Korean tradition is over 2,000 years old. In Korea there is an office, the Kukiwon, that records the names of all students who have reached *Dan* through any master recognized by the *Kukiwon*. In the US, the official organization is the United States Taekwondo Union (www.ustu.org) that is recognized by the *Kukiwon*. If I should some day actually achieve *Dan* my name will be recorded in the book, and I will get an official certificate from the *Kukiwon* proving to the entire world that I am Taekwondo *Dan*.

So, in each state all USTU member schools compete in a yearly tournament organized by a high level *Dan*. The competition is divided up by age, weight, and *Gup/Dan* level. There are also normally two events for competition:

Poomse or forms and *Gyoroogi* or fighting. In Tennessee Taekwondo is not really strong, so the state tournament *only* attracts about 500 participants. When you break that down, however, it means that in each class there are usually not more than 10 competitors until you get to black belts.

The competition takes a whole day with the youngest competitors going first and then working up to the adult black belts at the end of the day. That meant that I got the whole morning to size up the competition and get nervous. Of course Nick and Isaac competed in different rings, age groups, and belt classes and still managed to be performing at almost the same time. Isaac took third place in forms out of six competitors. In fighting, Isaac got second place after two matches.

I was able to tape Isaac's form and then run over to catch Nick's form. Nick's group was much tougher and he did not get a medal in forms. Nick was fighting well, but took a kick right in the nose. His face exploded in blood, and the referee called the match. That was a bit tough call for the referee because drawing blood in the youth divisions is supposed to be an automatic disqualification. In this case, however, Nick walked right into the kid's kick, and his guard was not up at all. I don't honestly think the kid was going for blood, so I really can't argue for giving him the match. If Nick could have gone 30 more seconds in the match he would have lost anyhow. After we got the blood cleaned up, Nick was ready to continue the match and was mad that they didn't let him continue. Nick was thrilled with winning the bronze medal in fighting, so there was really nothing to dispute.

After the youth matches were over and we took a lunch break a funny thing happened. Almost all of the men I had sighted as potential competition packed up and left! I started stretching and practicing kicks with my fellow students from Grosso's Martian Arts, but it soon became apparent that the ranks were mighty thin for adults below red belt. I suppose that this was predictable. After all, how many people are ~~insane~~ devoted enough to start studying martial arts at 43? I know that I am not alone because there are several other students near my age and level at GMA, but only I showed up at the state

tournament. When they combined all of the adults at 3rd and 4th *Gup*, there was a grand total of four men left, and one of the others was 36 year old Daniel Knell, one of my fellow GMA students.

We all competed in forms, and I choked big time. The form I was doing has lots of front-to-back movement, and I didn't allow enough room between my starting point and the judge's table. I got crowded against the table and couldn't make some of my moves correctly without kicking the judges (that's a big no-no). Danny did better than I did, but completely forgot one of the kicks. They gave us both third place medals in forms.

For fighting, there was simply not anyone in my class to spar with. There was one older oriental guy there that might have been a match, but he packed it up after form competition. They took a guy that was Danny's age from the 5th and 6th *Gup* group and let them fight an exhibition match and then gave them gold medals for their divisions. Then it was my turn.

I could have fought Danny, but we have sparred many times before at the school, and he had already fought one round. (Danny by the way is about a foot taller than I am and in *way* better shape. I can only land a kick on him if he lets me.) I was paired up with a 26 year-old guy who was 6" taller than me.

I started the match aggressively with my best distance-covering kick, a jumping roundhouse to the midsection. He evaded that and immediately nailed me with a roundhouse to the chest that I didn't even see coming. I tried to close with him again to try and slide in with a side kick. That one is good because it comes in with your turned sideways to the opponent and therefore less exposed. He dodged and popped me with a hook kick to the head. I jumped back and shook off the stars for a second, and then circled around and threw a spinning back kick that was really a feint that set me up to throw a roundhouse. That actually worked and I landed the kick with a reassuringly solid impact. He answered that by kicking me twice more in the hear bam-bam. I was realizing by then that I was badly overmatched and out of my depth.

This was supposed to be an exhibition match and neither of us was supposed to be going for blood. My opponent apparently didn't understand that very well. He continued to pound me three points to one for a minute that seemed to extend forever. I did not bow out, and took my lumps as they came. That is part of the game. In the end it didn't make a difference. We both got gold medals for our efforts. My performance was not stellar, but I did have the guts to show up and compete, so I feel that I deserved that medal just as much as if I had to fight through a crowd to get it.

My schoolmates were outraged at the judges that pared me up with the guy and to my opponent for charging in taking no prisoners in an exhibition match. I think that my opponent realized that he had stepped over the lines of propriety because he came up to me and apologized as I was packing up. I had my gold medal and head still attached, so I was not complaining. All told, I'm glad I competed in the tournament, but I'm not sure I'll do it again. I saw three people get knocked out in the red belt competition and unless I get a lot better in fighting by next year, I do not intend to compete at that level.

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU PAY FOR THAT TICKET?

In early April I headed off for a two-week tour of Argentina and Brazil. I hate to admit it, but I've found that I actually sleep better in coach than I do in Business Class. Even though the company would pay for me to fly Business to Brazil, Argentina, or Chile, I just can't make myself travel at all that extra expense for a six-course meal, a fancier seat, and a sleepless night. If I take a handful of Tylenol, a Dramamine, and a cup of wine with my meal, I usually zonk right out before the movie is into the second reel.

On April 1st Delta made my life easier by starting the long-anticipated direct flight from Atlanta to Buenos Aires. While I was waiting to board I sat next to a lady that spent the whole hour and an half before boarding calling friends on her cell phone and telling them how she was going go BA on a whim because her son flies for Delta and gave her the heads up that the business class on this new flight was not filling up and they were

just about giving away the seats if you could fly on the spur of the moment.

As it turned out, I would have been much better off to make my flight plans that way because I ended up changing flights four times before the trip was over. I really like visiting Brazil, but I can usually count on plans changing at the last minute when I go there. This time the schedule up to three days before the trip was dead simple. Home to Buenos Aires to Sao Paulo and back home. Of course the day after the travel agent issued the ticket a complication arose. Alex Vieira had arranged to make a call in the south Brazilian city of Porto Alegre on the Friday before I was to go home. He suggested flights from Sao Paulo to Porto Alegre on Thursday night, then proposed that we stay over on Friday night and not rush trying to get back. That was fine with me. My travel agent booked the flights, and all I had to do was inform Delta that I was going back to Atlanta on Saturday instead of Friday.

It was a bit nerve-wracking because as I was preparing to leave on April 3rd we had a freak late-season snow in Tennessee. Luckily the snow never managed to stick to the warm ground, but it doesn't take a lot of foulness in the weather to ground Tri-Cities International. My ASA flight was, for once, right on time, and I got to Atlanta with four hours to wait for the flight to Buenos Aires. I downed my wine, put in my earplugs, and the next thing I knew the sun was rising over the Brazilian coastline as they served us breakfast. I arrived to a hot and sunny day in Buenos Aires. I had habitually stayed at the historic Plaza Hotel until now, but a brand new luxury hotel had just opened in the building adjacent to the tower that houses the Eastman office. The new hotel was much more comfortable than the Plaza, and surprisingly less expensive to boot! Not only that, they had a huge exercise room that I had almost to myself so I could do my Taekwando workout. I met my Argentine contact, Waldo Dueñas, for lunch and then crashed until evening.

When I came to, I hooked up the computer and checked e-mail. There was a message from Alex Vieira with a change in plans. He had to return to Sao Paulo on Friday the 13th because he had to attend a wedding on

Saturday. I needed to change my flight to return with him, and then stay over on Saturday. That was no big deal to me although I would have preferred spending the night in Porto Alegre than Sao Paulo.

The customer calls in Argentina went well. We have a couple of new developments to introduce to customers right now, so there was something to catch people's interest. One nice thing about Buenos Aires is that the customers are all located in one side of the city so it is easy to make three or four calls in one day there. Waldo and I celebrated the end of a successful business week in an Italian restaurant where the placemats were printed with the following:

Heaven is where:

All the pizzerias are Italian.

All the police are British.

All the mechanics are German.

All the lovers are French.

And everything is organized by the Swiss.

Hell is where:

All the pizzerias are British.

All the police are German.

All the mechanics are French.

All the lovers are Swiss.

And Everything is organized by the Italians.

Not very PC, but funny.

I then had Saturday to myself, so I indulged in one of my favorite things to do in South America: A day of walking through Buenos Aires. It was great day for it. It was cool but sunny, and it seemed that everyone in the city was out on the streets. I toured my two favorite parts of the city, Calle Florida up to the Casa Rosada and the Government Plaza. I then went over to La Recoleta and browsed the flea market that springs up there every Saturday when the weather is nice. I had lunch in one of the open-air restaurants the line La Recoleta, and took my time examining all the nick-knacks on display in the vendor's stalls.

On the way back to the hotel I noticed a poster for a concert that night being held in one of the downtown theaters by Rick Wakeman, the keyboardist for the old group Yes. I grew up on that stuff, and I found it

interesting that he was still enough of a name to be doing a concert in Buenos Aires. I was tempted to see if there were tickets available.



Map of Buenos Aires. Note: Major streets meet in right angles. Compare this with the map of São Paulo later on.

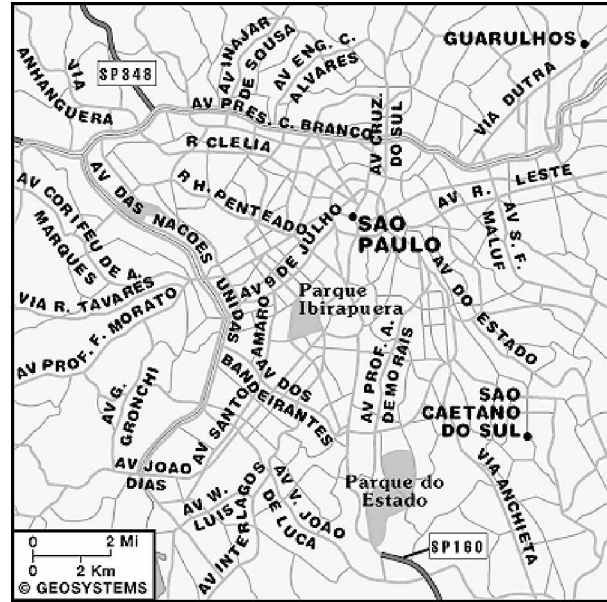
The next day I had an afternoon flight from BA to Sao Paulo. I started the morning with a workout in the gym, but I lost track of time and stayed a bit longer than I should have. When I got back to the room I had only 45 minutes to shower, dress, and repack my luggage before the taxi to the airport was supposed to get there. In my haste, I forgot to get my camera out of the room safe. I realized this when I got to Brazil, but by the time I got a message back to Waldo in Argentina my camera was long gone.

As I waited for boarding the flight I noticed that there was a group waiting together that looked like, well rock musicians. As we boarded the plane, two of them took up the other seats in my row. They were British, and were having a conversation that could have been right out of *This is Spinal Tap* about what clever shapes they could fold their boarding passes into. I was reading a book and not paying much attention until I looked at the hands of the guy in aisle seat. British rock musician type with hands of a concert pianist. Sure enough I was sharing a row on the plane with Rick Wakeman! He was amused that a chemist from East

Tennessee was traveling from Buenos Aires to Sao Paulo and was a fan of early 70's art rock. I got him to autograph my CD case. Through coincidence I was carrying a copy of the album he and the other four members of Yes had reunited to do in the early 90's.

Once in Sao Paulo, I had to find the TAM airlines ticket counter to change my flight from Porto Allegre to Sao Paulo. I thought this should be an easy thing. Alex had determined that the flights were nowhere near full, and I thought I had a full fare completely refundable ticket to work with. Nobody at the ticket counter even spoke Spanish, so it was a struggle to communicate as I desperately tried to remember the Portuguese words for what I needed to do. (Over 90% of Spanish verbs are identical in Portuguese, but *change* is not one of them. In Spanish it is *cambiar* but in Portuguese it is *trocar*. Go figure!) After many puzzled looks from the counter agent and consultation with the supervisor, they said that the 8:30 p.m. flight I wanted was not available, and that I would have to change to the 11:15 p.m. flight. That didn't make much sense, but I let them change the ticket.

Finally out of the airport, I checked into my least favorite hotel in Brazil, the Deville. The hotel is very close to the airport, close to several of the customers I needed to visit and conveniently accessible from the home of one of the Brazilian sales reps, Marcos Basso. The problem is that the Sao Paulo International Airport is not really in Sao Paulo, it is in a no-man's-land called Guarulhos. There is the airport, the Deville hotel, and an industrial war zone. You have to go another 20 minutes into Sao Paulo before you get to another hotel. Since they know they have a captive audience at the Deville, they don't go far out of their way to make guests comfortable. I could probably survive there without trouble except for two things. First, they saturate the place with a perfumed disinfectant in order to try and cover the mildewed odor emanating from the ancient threadbare carpet. I'm violently allergic to the stuff. Second, the hotel is right in the flight line for one of the airport runways, so a plane takes off right overhead every 10 minutes all day long. I have to sleep with earplugs since I am a light sleeper.



Map of São Paulo: Believe me folks, it doesn't begin to show it. One day a trip from Guarulhos to Via Anhanguera took 2 hours. The next day to took 30 minutes.

On the positive side, staying at the Deville can cut off quite a bit of commuting time. Sao Paulo traffic can be horrible. Unfortunately our customers are spread all over the city so while the hotel is very convenient for a few, it is hell-and-gone away from some others. Guarulhos is on the northeast edge of the sprawl of suburban sprawl on Sao Paulo. On Tuesday morning Alex Vieira and I had to make a call in a city outside of the western edge of the sprawl. It took two hours.

During that drive I told Alex that there had to be a better way to get from Porto Allegre to Sao Paulo on Friday evening than the 11:15 p.m. flight. He was mystified too because he called his travel agent and found that there were plenty of seats on the 8:30 flight. We decided to cut through the knot and call Delta. That was the real bottleneck since the only flight from Sao Paulo to Atlanta leaves at 10:30 p.m. Most of the domestic flights go through the old Sao Paulo city airport, Congonhas. I needed to get to the international airport, Guarulhos, in time to catch the flight to Atlanta.

It turned out that Delta's Brazilian partner airline, TransBrazil, has a 6:50 p.m. flight from Porto Allegre to Guarulhos that I could

catch. It was, however, bit confusing because they said that I would need to pay a \$100 conversion fee because of my fare class. Big deal! \$100 charged to the company after I sacrificed myself by flying coach was no problem at all. It still didn't make much sense because I thought I had a "Y" class full sucker fare ticket that should have been convertible any way I wanted. Still I would get home on Saturday instead of Sunday and the \$100 fee was less that I would have had to spend in another day and a half at a hotel.

Wednesday we ended up making a very long call on a potentially big customer. This company makes the paint that is used to mark highways, and they can use many of the things that Eastman makes. They had lots of questions and the call went on for hours. This was not too bad because the president of the company is a very attractive lady named Aurora. On that day she was wearing a see-through blouse with a black lace bra underneath. She frequently propped herself on the table on her elbows, concentrating her, ahem, assets while stroking my arm to keep my attention. As it there was a chance of losing it. I'm sure this lady is very successful in selling highway pinto to Brazilian road engineers. The problem was that the plant that produces the product she most needs from Eastman is currently sold out.

On Thursday I got to play chemistry professor. I spent the whole day in a training session with one of the distributors that handles Eastman's products in central Brazil. These are very nice people, and they were very eager to learn. They also had a lot of detailed questions that required me to delve into chemical theory to explain. By this time I was speaking "Portañol", kind of a Spanish-Portuguese pidgin by which I could at least make myself understood. The two languages are similar, and if you make some adjustments in some key verbs and add the Portuguese pronunciation to the common suffixes a Spanish speaker can speak Portuguese at least as well as Pepe Le Pew can speak French. My crowning achievement was an hour-long impromptu discussion of polymer rheology and viscoelastic behavior that I like to think my audience actually understood. One problem was that the

audience was a bit too enthusiastic. They really didn't want me to leave, and by the time we were able to tear ourselves away it was questionable if we could catch our flight to Porto Alegre.

Sure enough, Sao Paulo traffic lived up to its bad reputation, and we arrived at Congonhas airport a few minutes too late to make the flight. There was, however, another 45 minutes later that we could change to with no problem. We decided that this would be a good time to get TAM to endorse my ticket over to TransBrasil since the main sales counters for both airlines were there in Congonhas airport. As we waded through the line Alex and I compared tickets, and we began to understand why we were catching so much flak about changing my ticket. First, although we were flying the same route, Alex's ticket was \$200 less than mine. Second, my ticket was not the fully interchangeable "Y" class. When they changed my ticket back at Guarulhos they had changed me to something called "I" class. When the TAM counter agent wanted to charge me to change my ticket, I went ballistic. I pointed out that I had paid more than full rate for that ticket according to the Brazilian fare schedule, yet it was listed as a "promotional" non-refundable fare! When the agent finally connected that my ticket price was in US dollars, not Reales, her eyes got big and she ran for the supervisor.

By the time we left the counter we had my ticket endorsed and a confirmed reservation on the TransBrasil flight plus an apology from the TAM agent and a promise that I was due a refund somewhere. (When I checked at home I found this is a common practice with foreign carriers in order to both cheat travelers and make it as hard as possible to change air carriers in mid-trip.)

I have found that to really enjoy Brazil you have to get out of Sao Paulo. Of all the cities in Latin America, Sao Paulo is the one that is most out of control. Mexico City is bigger, has worse crime and pollution, and comparable traffic overburden, yet Mexico City seems to work whereas Sao Paulo really doesn't. Once you get away from it, however, Brazil is wonderful. Porto Alegre is an example. It is a medium sized city in a more temperate climate than São Paulo (read not

as hot). Alex and I arrived at 11 p.m. with no clear idea of where our hotel was, and in the middle of a blinding rainstorm. The rental car Alex got was at best very basic transportation. As we left the airport the windows fogged up, and we struggled to figure out how to get the defroster and rear-window defogger working. After several frustrating and increasingly dangerous minutes of looking for a switch to turn on the air conditioner and defogger, we discovered that the control knobs pulled out to turn on the climate control then rotated to control fan speed and temperature. We navigated through one-way streets to finally arrive at the hotel by midnight.

The last call of the trip was in Novo Hamburgo, a satellite city of Porto Alegre. Since my flight was at 6:50, I had not yet checked in with TransBrasil, and we were about a half-hour out from the airport, we really needed to leave by 4:30. Of course, the call dragged on because the customer had a lot of questions and was very interested in some of the things I was telling them about. We finally left at 5 p.m. only because it was Friday afternoon and the plant was closing for the weekend. We headed out into a torrential rainstorm, and an accident had slowed the traffic on the only route to the airport to a crawl. We made it to the airport at 6:15, and when I tried to check in for my flight they said the flight was closed, full, and I had no reservation. It looked for a while that I was going to be stuck in Brazil another day until I told them that my reservation was made through Delta instead of TransBrasil. Miraculously my reservation appeared and the counter agent handed me one of the most beautiful boarding passes I've ever had.

I then glanced at the monitor to see which gate I was supposed to go to and saw that my flight had been moved up to 6:40 and was in the process of boarding. As I headed towards security I heard one of the most dreaded things a traveler can hear over the PA system.

"Pascjero Gary Robe por favor mumble garble mumble mumble garble glorp."

I had my boarding pass in hand, so there was no way I was turning back to the counter. As I passed through the gate the same lady who

had given me the boarding pass five minutes earlier was taking up the tickets. All that was wrong was that she had given me the wrong seat assignment. As long as I had a seat on the plane I didn't particularly care if it was in the luggage compartment.

The plane left Porto Alegre on time and delivered me to Terminal A of Guarulhos Airport. I then had an argument at the exit because I was making a connection, but needed to go to the ticket counter. I was not supposed to leave the concourse. I then had to walk from Terminal A to the far side of Terminal D to the Delta counter. I held my breath as I handed over my tickets. Would my reservation be there? The counter agent gave me boarding passes for the Atlanta flight and connection to Tri-Cities as if I had gotten to this point without a hitch. I then had to trudge all the way back to Terminal A to catch the flight. After one gate change and a 1 ½ hour delay we took to the air. I grabbed two bottles of wine before putting in my earplugs and the next thing I knew we were flying up the Florida coast. Ah the joys of international travel.

Ever mindful of my friends I brought back two bottles of cachaça, Brazilian *aguargiente*, literally firewater. I shared it with my fellow SFPAN's at DSC by making *caipirihnas*, the traditional Brazilian cocktail for anyone brave enough. The recipe is simple. Take ¼ cup of sugar, squeeze the juice from one sectioned lime and drop the lime sections into the glass. Then add cachaça until the glass is ¾ full. Stir until most of the sugar is dissolved, add ice to the rim, and enjoy.

DSC 39 / TENACITY 1

The only thing that this year's DSC committee did that registered on the clue-o-meter prior to the convention was to invite Ned Brooks to be their fan GoH. Everything else from their nonexistent advertising to calling what seemed like half the projected attendance guests screamed disaster to me. On the other side, I also knew that the downtown Birmingham Ramada Inn was an ideal location for a convention. I also knew that plenty of friends were going to be there so regardless of whatever train wreck the

untested committee made of running the actual convention I knew that between Sue Francis' Derby Party, the two parties that Pat Molloy and Naomi Fisher were running and my two bottles of Brazilian firewater, a good time could be had in Birmingham.

Birmingham seems to be farther away from us than it is. In reality it is a nearly straight shot from Kingsport to Birmingham with interstate all the way. We departed home on Friday at noon and were checked in the hotel in time for dinner. The boys spotted the pool from the window of our room, and had to try it out. Corlis and I gave it the big toe test and didn't bother changing into our suits. For 8 and 9 year old boys, however, the pool became a test of will. Nick jumped in and screamed, climbed out, jumped in again to make sure it was as cold as he remembered and then announced that he was sued to the water. Isaac tried to back down the ladder, forced himself into the water for a few minutes, and then came to huddle in my lap for warmth. He was outraged that the hotel didn't have the pool heated. Explaining to him that by July they wouldn't need pool heating in Birmingham was not useful.

We ate in dinner in the hotel restaurant and then waited for the Boston in '04 party to open for desert. That proved to be a good place to meet people because almost everyone I wanted to make contact with felt the call of Naomi's cheesecake and made their way in to the party. I volunteered my room for the SFPA party on Saturday Afternoon. There was a time slot between Ned's panel and the start of Sue Francis' Kentucky Derby Party. I stayed up until about 3 a.m. hearing about Pat and Naomi's DUFF trip to Australia and bits of fannish gossip that had come up since Concave.

On Saturday morning I made a pass through the huxter room and picked out a stack of books at Larry Smith's display. The boys took another try at the pool to see if it had gotten warmer overnight. (It hadn't). It was soon time for the traditional DSC one-shot. The progress was slow because we had only two laptops to work with. I had intended to bring mine but forgot to put it in the car as I was packing. There was a pretty good turnout at for the one-shot. Afterwards we

headed out on a supply/lunch run with Toni. Over lunch we heard about her wedding plans.

After lunch we had just enough time to set the room up for the SFPA party and let the boys test the water in the pool again. No warmer. Then it was time for Ned's panel/roast. It is always good to listen to Ned and others reminisce about old times and fanzines. It makes me feel youthful to listen to things that happened well before I got into fandom.

After Ned's panel it was caipirihna time! Most of the adults were game to try one, and we managed to polish off one full bottle of cachaça without anyone getting the urge to samba. Most tried a sip, said "that's pretty nice," and then, "Hey, my tongue's numb!" The gathered SFPAns also got to see the headlight in full glory and to admire my Taekwondo medals. With a caipirihna each to start the festivities it was then time for mint juleps at Sue Francis' Kentucky Derby party.

The last time the Derby fell during DSC Sue made mint juleps all afternoon and sampled each batch. By that evening she was barely able to wobble to the front of the room to accept her Rebel award. This time she sampled only a few batches and was in much better control.

Sue also organized a betting pool for the race. I was too late to the room to get in on it, but Corlis had drawn *Invisible Ink*. The race was a great one with a spectacular lead change late in the race and an incredible run by *Monarcos*. Corlis' horse came in second and she got four dollars for her trouble. The last time we participated in a Kentucky Derby pool our horse came in dead last.

After the Derby it was time for some hard thinking. I had to finalize the recipient of the 2001 Rubble Award. Naomi Fisher heeded to make a party supply run so we headed out together in search of a grocery and a Krystal. After some searching we did locate a Krystal but made a horrifying discovery. Sometime in the last couple of years Krystal has gone smoke-free and they no longer have the cheap tinfoil ashtrays that are the traditional

Rubble Award! After polling past recipients and adding my own ideas, the staggering Rubble Committee decided to give the award this year to Steve and Sue Francis for giving up on running Rivercon before we were ready.

Once back at the hotel we whipped up a dinner group that included Steve and Sue. We went to Johnny Rockets for dinner. They serve the food on paper plates and during the meal I decided that one of them would be an acceptable surrogate for a Krystal ashtray. This decision was made more poignant because Steve and Sue would be receiving the Rubble later that night!

Pat and Naomi had decided that their lives were not full enough, so they volunteered to run both the Boston in '04 party on Friday night and the DSC 40 party on Saturday night. I spent what was left of the evening helping them move stuff up to the room where the Huntsville DSC party was going to be and then helping to rearrange furniture and decorate for the party.

That evening was quite full with a DSC 41 bid party, a Scotland in '05 Worldcon bid party and a Huntsville DSC 40 party running simultaneously. I happily spent the evening bouncing between floors. I didn't want to, but the prospect of the drive home on Sunday made me go to bed at about 1 a.m.

I was a bit irritated at the way the vote was handled for DSC 41. The only bid was from Chattanooga as a dual DSC/Libertycon. I don't have any problem with combining the DSC with another convention, but I was a bit put off by Tim Bolgeo's attitude about the thing. It was more like he was offering to take the DSC as a favor to Southern Fandom rather than any real desire to run a DSC. I was also irked that the vote was made by voice. I didn't intend to vote for Tim's bid, but an abstention in a voice vote is lost. I must be one of the few people in fandom that isn't much impressed by Tim Bolgeo, but I'm not. It seemed that the people in the business meeting were deferring to Tim as if he were some powerful dictator that had to be appeased. I'll go the DSC because it is a DSC and will not break my unbroken string of avoiding Libertycon.

After the business meeting we went to lunch with Pat, Naomi, and Richard Dengrove. Richard must have been our good luck charm because the restaurant didn't foul up our order at all. The last several meals we have eaten with just Pat and Naomi had been complete restaurant meltdowns, so it was nice to have a normal meal for a change. After that we helped haul the party decorations and utensils out to Pat and Naomi's car and bid farewell to Birmingham.

MY NEW COMPUTER SYSTEM

In March the Eastman yearly bonus was paid out and for the first time in three years it was more than enough to buy dinner for four at McDonalds. I decided to use some of the bonus money to upgrade my computer. Earlier in the year I built a computer for my church by ordering components from Thompson's Computer Warehouse Outlet (www.tcwo.com). They generally have good prices on their components, cheap shipping, and excellent technical support. I ordered a barebones system with a Pentium III 800 Mhz processor, 128 MB of memory, a 20 GB hard drive, a Yamaha 16/10/40 CD-W Drive, Windows 2000 and Office 2000. The whole package came in less than \$1500.

My plan was to put this system together and then connect to my creaking old 166 Mhz Cyrix system running Windows ME in a peer-to-peer network so that I could transfer all my old files to the new computer. The assembly of the new computer was a piece of cake, and the installation of Windows 2000 and all the other software I had went with minimal problems. The only hitch was that the setup CD that came with the system did not have Windows drivers for the modem. The first call I made to technical service pointed me to the modem manufacturer's website for the drivers. I downloaded them using my old computer, transferred them to a floppy with Win Zip, and then installed them on the new computer. They didn't work. Another call to tech service revealed that the same company makes slightly different modems under different names and Windows 2000 will happily accept the wrong driver. Another trip through cyberspace snagged the

right drivers and now everything works fine. Until I tried to set up the network that is.

I installed the network cards, added the services, protocols, etc, and tried to get the computers to talk. My initial problem was that I had set up my old PC using a software image disk from work that added a bunch of extraneous security patches that essentially made it impossible to connect the computer to any network except for the Eastman Intranet. I could not change the PC name or Workgroup, and was basically screwed. I transferred all of the files I wanted to keep to the second hard drive of the old computer, formatted the C drive and re-installed Windows ME. That got rid of the Eastman stuff, but I still can't get the two boxes to talk to each other except to exchange names. I'll have to dedicate another evening to communing with Microsoft to see if they can find out what is happening. As far as I can tell my old PC simply refuses to register on the network.

BOOKS AND MOVIES AND TV, OH MY!

I wasn't sure what to think when the SciFi channel announced that they were doing a *Dune* miniseries. While parts of David Lynch's theatrical version were excellent, I always felt they had spent too much time on being weird and not enough on the story. The result was something that looked like *Dune* but unless you knew the story you were lost.

Now the SciFi Channel was adapting the story in a format that had the potential of doing *Dune* justice, but they had obviously sunk most of the budget into effects because the only familiar actor in the production was William Hurt as Duke Leto. That's a good choice but he gets killed off early on.

I'm happy to report that the TV miniseries was as good as anyone might have wished. Yes, all the actors were no-names, but they all carried out their parts well. With nearly six hours to use, they managed to get almost all of Frank Herbert's story on the screen. My only quibble is that they rushed the ending. The whole climactic battle between Paul and Feyd is over in two minutes, they cut out the really important battle between

Paul and Count Fenrig, and wrap up the whole defeat of the Empire in about 20 minutes. I felt there were plenty of places where they could have cut out a few minutes of establishing shots and spent more on the finale. These are quibbles however. If you missed the show on SciFi, the whole program is available on VHS and DVD. If you want to see an excellent adaptation of one of SF's most revered books, check it out.

Being parents of elementary school aged kids, we were obliged to go see *Spy Kids*. In a nutshell think of *Austin Powers* in the fourth grade. Actually it was a better movie than it had to be for its market. Parents will find enough in-jokes to be amused, and the plot is not really that much more implausible than some of the James Bond series. In this case an Evil Genius and his assistant, Minion, are taking over the world by mind control of children through a TV show and simultaneously creating robotic duplicates of the children of all the world's heads of state. All the secret agents sent in to foil the plot are converted into characters in the kiddie show. The last hope is a couple of agents who married, dropped out of The Game, and had kids. When Mom and Dad fall victim to the Evil Genius the kids have to step up and save the world.

On a much higher level, there is *Shrek* a magnificently computer animated feature recent released. This is the first movie I've seen that has ever come close to *The Princess Bride* in mining the world of myth for mirth. Our hero is Shrek, a gruesome ogre that enjoys hanging out in his swamp and occasionally, eating whatever isn't fast enough, and occasionally scaring the piss out of the villagers who come to slay the evil ogre. But all is not well in fairyland. The noxious Lord Farquart has decreed that all the fairy tale creatures of his land are to be rounded up and relocated to, well, somewhere else. The somewhere else turns out to be Shrek's swamp and he is none too keen to share.

Lord Farquart obtains a magic mirror with the expectation that it will proclaim him the grandest ruler in the land. The catch is that the mirror decides he isn't really a king because he has no princess to marry. This is a bit of a problem since Lord Farquart is

three feet tall with the courage of a sprig of asparagus. The mirror reveals the location of three eligible princesses, but Farquart cannot "lower" himself to go on a quest. A tournament is arranged to choose a champion to rescue the princess and deliver her to Farquart. Shreck shows up and trounces all the potential champions so Farquart decides to let Shrek rescue the princess in exchange for sweeping all the fairies from his swamp.

The animation in this film is like nothing ever seen before. It leaves Disney and Pixar in the dust. The characters voiced by Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, John Lithgow, and Cameron Diaz are all great. The movie manages to borrow from everything from Pinocchio to Charlie's Angels to hilarious effect. I would gladly go see this one several more times just to catch and memorize more of the dialogue. This is a very encouraging start to the summer movie season.

Moving back to the small screen we consider the fifth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In the past Buffy has faced indestructible demons, fallen in love with a nice vampire who turned very bad once they made love, sent her lover to hell, went to hell to get him back, saved the world from a demon mayor, served as a conduit for unspeakable power in order to destroy an unholy demon cyborg, fell in love again with a mysterious bionic government agent, drove him away when he lost his powers and couldn't keep up with her, and made peace with the spirits of slayers past. All this was done before she reached legal drinking age.

This season Buffy was pitted against an evil god, Glory, or Glorificus to be formal. This god was kicked out of her home dimension for being too bad, and has spent millennia trying to get back home. Her goal is to find an inter-dimensional Key that will break down the barriers between universes and allow her to escape our world. Of course, her opening the portal back to home brings down the barriers between all the universes so they all bleed into each other and cause a breakdown in reality, a.k.a. end of the world.

Glory discovers a group of monks hiding The Key. At the last minute the monks invoke

some magic and send The Key to Buffy by somehow taking part of Buffy's life energy and turning it into a sister. With me so far?

Glory cannot be defeated by any mortal means, so Buffy's usual tactic of hacking into little bits won't work. She is also stronger than any Earthly magic, so that's no help. To further complicate life, Buffy's mother dies, leaving Buffy alone with a kid sister and an angry god to fight.

In the ultimate episode, Glory has figured out that the sister, Dawn, is The Key and has taken her to prepare for a ritual that will open the portal using Dawn's blood. During a certain time window, the blood of The Key will open the portal and it will stay open for as long as The Key's blood flows. That is, as long as she is alive. At the moment of truth, Dawn and Buffy are faced with an impossible choice. One of them must jump into the gap and die to close the portal. Since Dawn is made from Buffy, they have the same blood so either of them will do the job. Buffy, with a life of pain behind her, abandoned by one lover, untouchable by the other, decides to breach the gap herself and die heroically.

Will the creators of the show have the guts to leave their main character dead and go on from there, or will they find that she is just Mostly Dead? It could go either way. In the show's mythos there is precedent for what happens when The Slayer dies. After all, it happened to Buffy-twice! In each case, a new slayer rises to take her place. The first time it happened Buffy was out of the universe for a while rescuing Angel from Hell. That brought on Faith who then went bad and allied with the evil Mayor of Sunnydale. In the second case, Buffy was so badly injured that her heart stopped for a few minutes, and Kendra appeared to take her place. Faith killed Kendra and framed Buffy so that she could help The Mayor complete his Evil Plans.

Anyhow, with Buffy dead for even a minute, there will be a new slayer to contend with. (This time Buffy stays dead long enough for the last shot of the show to be of her tombstone.) One would assume that the new slayer would be attracted to Sunnydale, the current focal point for most of the weirdness in our universe. It could be interesting to see

how a new slayer who, unlike Buffy, was brought up in the Watcher Tradition gets along with The Scoobies, Buffy's entourage.

In the end, I suspect that they will find a way to resurrect Buffy because the show is so heavily associated with Sarah Michelle Gellar. Still, it would be interesting for a drama centered around one central hero character to have to cope with losing the hero.

Switching tracks to print, I picked up a big pile of books at DSC and have been diligently working my way through them. First, I was very impressed with Catherine Asaro, the Guest of Honor at DSC. This is a lady who is already a world-class physicist and finds time to write SF novels between papers on quantum physics. I picked up the first couple of books in her big series and two others that stand independently.

In *Primary Inversion* she introduces a future mostly populated by three blocks of humans. There is the Earth based branch that forms a neutral zone, the Trader Empire, and The Skolian Empire. Both of the empires are descended from a group of Mayans who were displaced from Earth thousands of years ago by a race of aliens. The aliens died out, but the humans were able to adapt their technology into a star-spanning society. The Mayans were taken from Earth because they possessed a rare genetic ability to use quantum tunneling to develop an empathic sense. The telepathic genome, however, was riddled with fatal recessive traits, and centuries of inbreeding caused the society to fall and the telepaths lose viability.

As a last-ditch effort one geneticist tried an experiment to isolate the telepathic genes without the fatal ones. His mistake led to the rise of a sadistic race that feeds on the pain of the empaths. Thus the evil Traders prey on the empathic Skolians in a Forever War. The Skolians manage to survive by using their telepathic skills to weave a new to instantaneous communication allowing them to out maneuver the Traders.

Upon this framework Ms. Asaro weaves a series of romances all dealing with the fragile genetics of the ruling Skolian class and their efforts to evade the Traders and somehow

strengthen their bloodline. She creates some very likable characters, lots of space battle action, and the guy gets the girl in the end.

I heard several people raving about John Ringo at DSC, so I decided to give his *A Hymn Before Battle* and *Gust Front* a try. In *Hymn*, humanity makes it to the stars only to find a Galactic civilization in the midst of a terrible war with the cannibalistic Posleen. These worse-than-evil aliens descend on a planet, eat the natives, and strip it clean before moving on. Human warriors join the fight and manage to, for the first time, actually knock the Posleen off a world. The only problem is that the Posleen know the location of Earth, and it looks yummy to them.

In *Gust Front* the Posleen are on their way, and Earth is trying to ready defenses. The veterans of the extraterrestrial wars know what is coming, but the politicians and armchair generals can't/won't believe them. The Galactic allies promise high-tech weapons, but don't deliver, so the invaded Earth has to mostly make do with Gulf War weapons except for some really nifty battle suits that the aliens hand out like candy. The Posleen land in the worst possible place defense-wise: central Virginia. Will the plucky Virginians manage to puree a couple million alien invaders? Will the few battle suited troops manage to save Washington DC? You betcha. I could have done without a couple of the early chapters that dealt mostly with military organization and bickering. I felt that Ringo overlabored his points there and could have gotten the action started a lot sooner. He also filled the narrative was so much military jargon that he was obliged to add a glossary in the back. That did a lot of good as I was trying to puzzle through the story. There was a lot of stuff that could have been explained in the story, and a lot that could have been left out to make a tighter story. I still kept turning pages to the end and will probably pick up the next in the series to see where it goes.

That will do it for now. Next time will be interesting because I'm be going on a week-long mission trip to Mexico City. The trip to help homeless kids meshes with the yearly Paint Show in Mexico, so I would be going there anyhow. It should make an interesting story!

MAILING COMMENTS

THE SOUTHERNER NO. 220: JEFFERY COPELAND—To truly appreciate Krispy Kreme donuts they need to be had fresh and hot off the glazer. They then have a half-life of about 12 hours. After that they become a shadow of their initial glory. Actually I know of a better donut called Dixie Crème that is only available in Bowling Green, Kentucky. These are the donuts I grew up with and all others pale in comparison. I do say, however, that hot Krispy Kremes are very close to donut nirvana.

The mailing arrived while I was traveling so I am unsure of the date, but it was in good condition. Great to see a new and apparently enthusiastic member in Trinlay Khandro. Thanks for formalizing the “last Thursday” deadline. I about had a cow when I read my week-old e-mail and found that I had missed the deadline. I just noticed that there are five months in 2001 with five Thursdays. Is that unusual? I turn to the font of all knowledge that is SFPA: What is the maximum and minimum number of months in a year with five Thursdays? No non-leap February can have more than four repetitions of any day of the week, and all the rest of the months have to have at least one repetition of five and a maximum of three. What is the probability that there are five Thursdays in a month?

TYNDALLITE NO. 95: NORM METCALF - REYRCMT: Feller—I think your definition of science fiction is a bit narrow not to include *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *The Invisible Man*, and some of the other early classics. Just because Captain Nemo’s *Nautilus* was made from 19th century technology doesn’t exclude it from being science fiction. It might have been constructed from materials of the day, but the fact is that nobody was even close to building such a vessel for 40+ years after Verne’s book as published in 1869. Plus Verne proposed an energy source for the submarine that is quite close to nuclear power. At least Verne realized that a truly

long-range submarine would need a power source that didn’t consume oxygen.

As for *The Invisible Man*, just because Well’s concept is impossible doesn’t make it less science fiction. Good grief! How many of our favorite SF stories use faster-than-light drives that are just as impossible as Well’s invisible man that can see! On one hand you are dismissing Verne for using completely plausible engineering to design a machine that was a half-century before its time and Wells on the other hand for inventing pseudo-science to advance his story. I’m sorry, it doesn’t hold up.

THE NEW PORT NEWS # 196: NED BROOKS—I don’t think you can take the blame for the failure of the DSC committee to advertise the convention. They did that all themselves. I got a strong impression of a group that “knew” what they were doing without first finding out how everybody else does it. Apparently they had a web page and expected to attract people through the Internet. They did send fliers to other conventions because a stack did show up at Concave. On the other hand they might have been hand delivered by Julie Wall or the Rowans. Regardless, the convention was fun if sparsely attended. There was an excellent SFPA contingent and it was fun watching Guy panic whenever he was out of sight of Rosie. It seemed like he was still so surprised that she had agreed to marry him that he was afraid that she might come to her senses if she was out of range!

I can’t believe you don’t find aluminum foil useful. It is the essential component in everything from grilling corn over a campfire to making a last-minute Halloween costume!

The zero tolerance movement is missing a beat with martial arts. There are several 13-year old black belts in our *dcjang* trained to execute killing moves in a split second. I know that Nick can deliver a kick to Corlis’ head because he likes to demonstrate it! It seems to me that this is a dangerous thing to

have roaming the halls of an elementary school. I need to bring this up with the Sullivan County Superintendent of Schools. He is a second-degree black belt at our *dcjang*. I'm sure he'll see the problem.

We eat beef regularly at our house without a second thought. Of course, we get our meat from my parent's farm where the only growth hormone the cattle get is whatever they produce themselves. Denial of external threats seems to be an American trait at least as old as December 7, 1941. When eating at restaurants I prefer chicken and seafood so I'm only at risk for salmonella, mercury poisoning, and residual pesticides. We're all gonna die.

The head came from Pier 1 Imports. I've had it for over 10 years. It was not until I found a stopper that fit that I was able to transform it into the headlight. It now sits on the corner of my dresser with my Taekwondo medals hanging from it.

Eastman sells duplicating fluid, and the formula is not really a secret. The problem would be in buying the individual components without the DEA asking some questions. There are several grades. Here is the specification for Duplicating Fluid #10, 95%. It also comes in an anhydrous version without the water.

<i>EASTMAN</i> Duplicating Fluid 10, 95%	
Property	Specification Limits
APPEARANCE	CLEAR, CLEAN LIQUID
COLOR, PT-CO SCALE	10 MAX
SPECIFIC GRAVITY, 60/60F	0.810 - 0.816
ACIDITY AS ACETIC ACID, WT%	0.005 MAX
WATER, WT%	7.0 MAX
ETHYL ALCOHOL, WT%	75.0 - 82.0
METHYL ALCOHOL, WT%	11.0 - 16.0
n-PROPYL ACETATE, WT%	0.7 - 1.5

VARIATIONS ON A THERE #5: RICHARD LYNCH—I read an interesting analysis of the energy shortage in US News and World Reports a few weeks ago. In Vice-President Chaney's big scary-sounding speech about how many new power plants we would have to bring on-line each day to keep up with demand he didn't say anything about the current rate of power

plant construction. It turns out that generating plants are being built right now at such a rate that construction would actually have to slow down to meet Chaney's targets. Because of deregulation electricity generation is so lucrative right now that utilities can't seem to invest money in generating facilities. The corner we seem to have backed ourselves into is that we have essentially locked into natural gas fired plants as the environmentally lesser of evils and therefore have set ourselves up for shocks like this one.

The administration's energy policy is about the only option we have to quickly expand the energy supply is to burn more oil and coal and revive the nuclear industry. When it comes down to environmentalism and blackouts, I predict that Americans will support the environment in the opinion polls and the oil companies in the voting booth. I would rather have tax money spent on alternative energy sources than a missile defense system, but we have oil men holding the reins at the moment so hydrocarbons are going to continue to rule for a while.

SPIRITUS MUNDI #182: GUY H. LILLIAN III—Mardi Gras with a SF theme sounds great! I'm still not sure how I like living in the actual 2001 compared to the vision back in 1968. Back then 2001 seemed way in the future and anything is possible. The reality seems to be a demonstration of the Third Law of Thermodynamics: things don't get better. In 1968 we could have had a moonbase and wagon wheel space station in 2001. We could have been sending people to the planets. Earlier Norm Metcalf was kvetching that 20,000 *Leagues Under the Sea* is not science fiction because it was based on technology that was available in its day. You could make the same case for 2001. We were sending people to the moon in 1968 and moving into space was only a matter of will. The technology is still there but I fear that we've lost the will.

Instead, we have W committing us to spending billions on a missile defense system

that may never work and may never be needed. We are hundreds of times more likely to being nuked by a terrorist carrying in a briefcase bomb than a missile attack. I would much rather spend money on a sense of wonder than paranoia and fulfilling the wet dreams of Grandpa Reagan.

Congratulations on your impending marriage. I know I've never seen you in such a state of agitation than at DSC every time your bride-to-be was out of sight. It looks like I'll be traveling in the South at the end of June. Otherwise The Robe Experience would probably try to attend. I'm sure you'll tell us all about it after the fact!

You are certainly not forbidden to go to Concave. Mardi Gras is early next year, so there is a not a conflict there. Bill Francis will be the GoH.

FREQUENT FLYER: TOM FELLER—I am sorry to hear about your grandmother's death. It sounds like it hit you about like the death of my maternal grandmother Irene in 1988. Corlis and I were planning for our wedding when Grandma Irene went into Vanderbilt Hospital to clear out a life-threatening blockage in her carotid arteries. She came through the surgery fine, but the stress sent her into congestive heart failure and she died about a week later after being taken off of ICU support. I had the privilege of staying close both physically and socially to Irene until right up to her death.

She moved from South Bend Indiana to Bowling Green to be closer to us and so that we could help her as she got more feeble. We stayed close, but she never became feeble. Her body just wore out at 92, but her mind and spirit never lost a bit. It still makes me sad that Irene never lived to see Corlis and me married or her great-grandsons.

The week before Easter the boys had their spring break and we shipped them off to stay with their grandparents in Bowling Green. That meant that Corlis and I could catch up on non kid-appropriate entertainment that we normally avoid when there are kids in the house. One of those was the *Sex in the City* collection. We have been catching current episodes as we can on HBO. When they are

on target, it is a hilarious show, but I don't care much for it when it strays into melodrama. Have you seen the dress that "Samantha" sort of wears in the promo for the season premiere next month?

REVENANT #5: SHEILA STRICKLAND—It is so cool to have a relative that you can point to on a CD cover. I have a cousin, Terry Graves, who is among the best classical guitarists in the world. About 10 years ago he was in a guitar group called The De Falla Trio. I have all their CDs. When Nick was about six months old they were in concert in Lexington, KY, and we went up to see them. We just *knew* that Nick would pitch a fit during the concert so we sat next to a door in order for one of us to make a swift exit with a squalling child. Guess what. At the first note, Nick went stiff, rapt with attention and didn't make a sound through the concert. At the reception afterwards Terry told us he saw the baby in the audience and shuddered, and couldn't believe it when he stayed quiet.

I just say a longer trailer for *The Fellowship of the Ring* last weekend before *Pearl Harbor* and I must agree that the movie looks spectacular. I guess we'll have to see how it turns out. I've also looked at the trailer for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* on the Warner Brothers website and it looks good too. I know that the whole Robe family will be at the premier showing of *Harry Potter* even if it is at midnight and one of us has to stand in line all day to get tickets.

It was good to see you at DSC!

COMMENTS #10 STEVE HUGHES—Your comments on the California power shortage set me to thinking how America would react to a real crisis now. After watching *Pearl Harbor* last weekend and thinking about how much has changed in the last 50 years does not fill me with confidence.

In 1941 the US was still struggling with the Great Depression. People were both used to deprivation and ready to unite behind something. There have only been two cases in the history of the US of an external attack galvanizing an American military response: The Alamo and Pearl Harbor. The World

Trade Center was bombed ten years ago but we mostly wrote off the attack and went about our business. The problem is that our biggest threat these days is from Islamic terrorists. These types of attacks do not lend themselves to mass action because there is no identifiable enemy to attack.

The greatest threat we have of a ground war would be if China would invade Taiwan. Would we enter a war on Taiwan, or would we let the Chinese take it without getting involved? I think the leadership would calculate that Taiwan is only a little island and China is impossibly large and far away to fight without lobbing nukes. We would stand by and let China and Taiwan fight it out and let the winner make our toys and microchips.

TWIGDRASIL AND TREEHOUSE GAZETTE #69: RICHARD DENGROVE—With your known aversion to conventions it was a really pleasant surprise to see you in Birmingham! In some ways it was the best kind of convention. The organized part was minimal and didn't get in the way of socializing. It was good to hang out with you for a while and I'm glad that your health problems are at least stable.

It sounds to me like your computer problem is not the operating system. In my experience stuff like is happening to you is a symptom of a bad motherboard. The thing seems to be working OK until it heats up a bit and then crashes. I had the same kind of thing happen to me with a computer that I built a few years ago. I finally fixed it by doing a hard drive transplant into a new box and suddenly all the problems disappeared.

My Best Investment of the Year award so far goes to my cable modem. Just like your cell phone I can be on-line to download fixes while on the phone to tech service. Not only that the response time for the internet is even better than my T1 connection at work. I know that that speed should decrease as the cable company loads up the line, but we are talking East Tennessee here so I don't expect noticeable service degradation for years. I looked into DSL, but I'm too far away from the switch to get a line.

The Invisible Man series that shows on the SciFi network gets around the vision problem by making their man invisible in the visible wavelengths only. The magic potion (actually a hormone secreted by a synthetic gland) that makes him invisible also changes his eyes so he can see in infrared wavelengths. It's still a hokey SF premise but at least the show's producers recognized this classic problem and wrote something into the plot to get around it.

No, my cubs aren't Eagle Scouts yet, but I do think the dads that lead the pack should get the Distinguished Service Medal. We just wrapped up the scout season with a graduation ceremony and what was supposed to be a cookout and camping weekend. Of course Mother Nature decided to break the month-long drought in our area that afternoon. We now have bought enough hamburger and hot dogs to feed the whole den plus parents using the den budget. I have reserved a picnic shelter and camp area at the Eastman Recreation Area in a couple of weeks to make it up. We should be able to at least consume the meat since we can cook in the shelter rain-or-shine.

PETER, PAN, & MERRY #36: DAVE SCHLOSSER—Speaking of Hebrew, or at least Biblical, names, my son Isaac has been frustrated that he does not have a nickname. My oldest son's full name is Dominic, but we have always called him Nick. He, in fact, refused to be born until we picked that name. We always knew his middle name would be Maurice after my paternal grandfather. (We weren't going to saddle our child with that as a first name.) Early in Corlis' pregnancy I quipped that if we chose an "N" name for the baby his initials would be NMR, a fitting monogram for the son of a chemist. That idea stuck but we didn't like any "N" names until we compromised on Dominic after Dominic Flandry with Nick for short.

Anyhow, last weekend Isaac announced that he was tired of not having a nickname and that we were from now on to call him Izzy. All things considered, I think that fits him better.

REYRCMT : Guy—I certainly hope that CJD does not occur *unnaturally*. That would be

one for the X-Files. It is still a really creepy disease that doesn't seem to have a cause. Here we have two syndromes, CJD and Alzheimer's showing up strongly at almost the same time that turn brains to guacamole. Albeit the mechanisms and progression of the diseases are different but it is still unsettling that two brain diseases are popping up at the same time.

I've also thought of starting Nick on the John Carter books. The problem is that I can't find my copy of the first book in the series. I religiously bought the reissues about 20 years ago with the glorious Michael Whelan wrap-around covers, so I know I have a complete set in the library somewhere. It's probably right next to the copy of Plato's Fifth Book of Poetics. Anyhow, both boys seem to be picking up reading on their own these days and have a pile of books to read that I really don't have to add to it.

The way we cultured anaerobic bacteria was simply to use an agar-filled test tube and inoculate the culture about an inch below the surface. It's not a completely anaerobic environment but you certainly get some different bugs there than on the surface of a petri dish.

YNGVI IS A LOOUSE AND OTHER GRAFFITOS #70:

T. K. F. WEISSKOPF—The best bit of the zine goes to Patrick Gibbs essay on the electoral college. I *thought* I understood the electoral process and the constitution until the day after the election. I quickly jumped on the Internet to find a copy of the constitution. I soon found that plus a really nifty commentary site that had a Top 10 List of Things Not in the Constitution. The number one thing on the list was the Right to Vote. Not there. Pat did a good job of succinctly summing up the points of constitutional law and the reasons for the Founding Fathers putting them there. I also spent a day poking around state constitutions to see how they handle voting and the determination of Electoral College delegates. I used to think that liquor laws were complex.

As for *Flare*, don't bother, I've already got a copy *somewhere* in my library of lost books. I never give a book away or sell to used

bookstores. I just don't have space and will to organize them!

Robbie Coltrane is playing Hagrid. It looks like they are working with camera angles and costuming to make him look big from what I can see of from the trailer. We'll have to wait and see how effective that is.

Aristotle Meets Gensnback: Jeffrey Copeland—Arthur C. Clarke may have been behind the curve in *Imperial Earth* as far as PDAs are concerned, but we're halfway through 2001 now and there's no sign of HAL yet!

First one to the doorway wins, eh? Sounds like a good Earthquake plan to me! The last one I rode through struck while I was on The Throne. I guess I lost that round.

Ditto on your review of *Gladiator*. Last year was not a stellar year for Hollywood. I was really rooting for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* to take the Oscar. I think that would have been healthy for the whole industry.

Planet of the APAs: Trinlay Khadro—Welcome to SFPA! I don't think we have met although I see that you know some of the other SFPAns. How about a bit of an autobio next time?

I remember having a conversation with Jack Chalker and Mike Resnick at Midwestcon four years ago when they were talking about being beta testers for Windows '98. Jack said that the new OS had some promising features, but they had included some of the most annoying features of Bill Gates' worst marketing mistake, *Microsoft Bob*. It gave the desktop "friendly" names like "My Computer" and "My Network Neighborhood". Jack explained that he had renamed the cutesy icons to stuff like "Mr. Network's Neighborhood". When I installed my first copy of Windows '98 one of the first customizations I did was to rename "My Computer" to "Mi Caja Su Caja", "My Documents" to "Stuff I've Done", "Network Neighborhood" to "Puterz in da Hood", and "Recycle Bin" to "Stinking Garbage Heap". I think it's an improvement although the technicians tend to roll their eyes when I need work done on my computer at work.

I've been a *They Might Be Giants* fan ever since my brother-in-law sent a copy of their

first album, *Lincoln*, to my wife many years ago. I've never gotten to see them live. We've got both kinds of music up here in the East Tennessee Hills – Country and Western. TMBG has been getting a lot more attention lately since they are doing the music for the Fox show *Malcolm in the Middle*.

There's no such thing as too many martial arts movies. I got hooked on them with one of Roger Ebert's top 10 Guilty Pleasures, *Kill and Kill Again*. Of course it helps that my whole family is deeply into martial arts.

Trivial Pursuits #94: Janice Gelb—I can't imagine Naomi Fisher being shy about anything, but on the other hand neither Pat or Naomi are self-promoters so I can see where imposing themselves on strangers might be hard. It seems, however, that they had a great trip and are now shifting into the administrator job.

The cartoon strip on you back page reminds me of a pet peeve of Corlis and me. Weather forecasters, especially on The Weather Channel, have turned the word "overnight" into a noun. They say stuff like "We'll see low temperatures during the overnight." That's irritating and stupid, especially since it could be said more clearly and economically, as "We'll have low overnight temperatures". There must have been some complaints because I've noticed them using it less lately.

Snow and Schmoozing: Janice Gelb—This year's Concave seems to be going down as one of the great ones. I'm glad you were there to participate. Be sure never to let Naomi forget that she neglected to make your reservation for Thursday arrival! Tom Chaney and The Bookstore made statewide news a few weeks after the convention. One of the Louisville Courier-Journal feature writers did an article about Tom and Horse Cave. I knew he was interesting just through my dealings with him in arranging the banquet. I didn't know just how interesting. He has been a university drama professor, Baptist preacher, farmer, and now owner of a bookshop/ restaurant and part owner of Horse Cave Theater. He also spent a couple years in jail because someone grew marijuana on some land he owned.

I couldn't resist the program change flier. Like Steven's chocolate roses, it was just too good not to do.

Guilty Pleasures #18: Eve Ackerman—My son's school enrichment program is no great shakes. As far as I can tell all the teacher has done is to show them how to log on to an Internet browser and told them to find all they can about King Tut. Nick is enthusiastic about the stuff they have found, but as far as I can tell there was no attempt to collect and organize their research. Also, the teacher seems to have pointed the kids at the computer and then left them at it. She then retreated to her office and closed the door.

Kvetching Tiger, Droopy Drawers: George Wells—Well, now we know where *Buffy* was headed. You weren't far wrong with Dawn ending up as a bloody sacrifice. I see that Sarah Michelle Geller is signed up for next season, so it looks like she is just Mostly Dead. Just poke a chocolate-covered spell down her throat and she'll perk right back up.

Oblivio #133: Gary Brown—"Be my valentine." I wish I had thought of that when I had my colonoscopy done last year. Of course it was Valentine's Day. Congratulations on being "boringly healthy". May you have many more years of the same.

It looks like it will be a happier baseball year in Cleveland than it will be in Atlanta. The Braves finally managed to claw their way over 0.500 this week. The whole National League East is a disaster area with only one team above 500. There is some justice in seeing that after shelling out megabucks Texas is in dead last place and the Mariners are on top of the AL West. Funny game.

Speaking of funny games, thanks for the updates on the Florida election. From what I've seen the situation was an electoral Pearl Harbor. All the signs were there for a disaster, the election officials smugly assumed that because nothing had gone wrong before there was no danger, and then the whole thing blew up. It is interesting that the Palm Beach Post got flamed for doing its job.