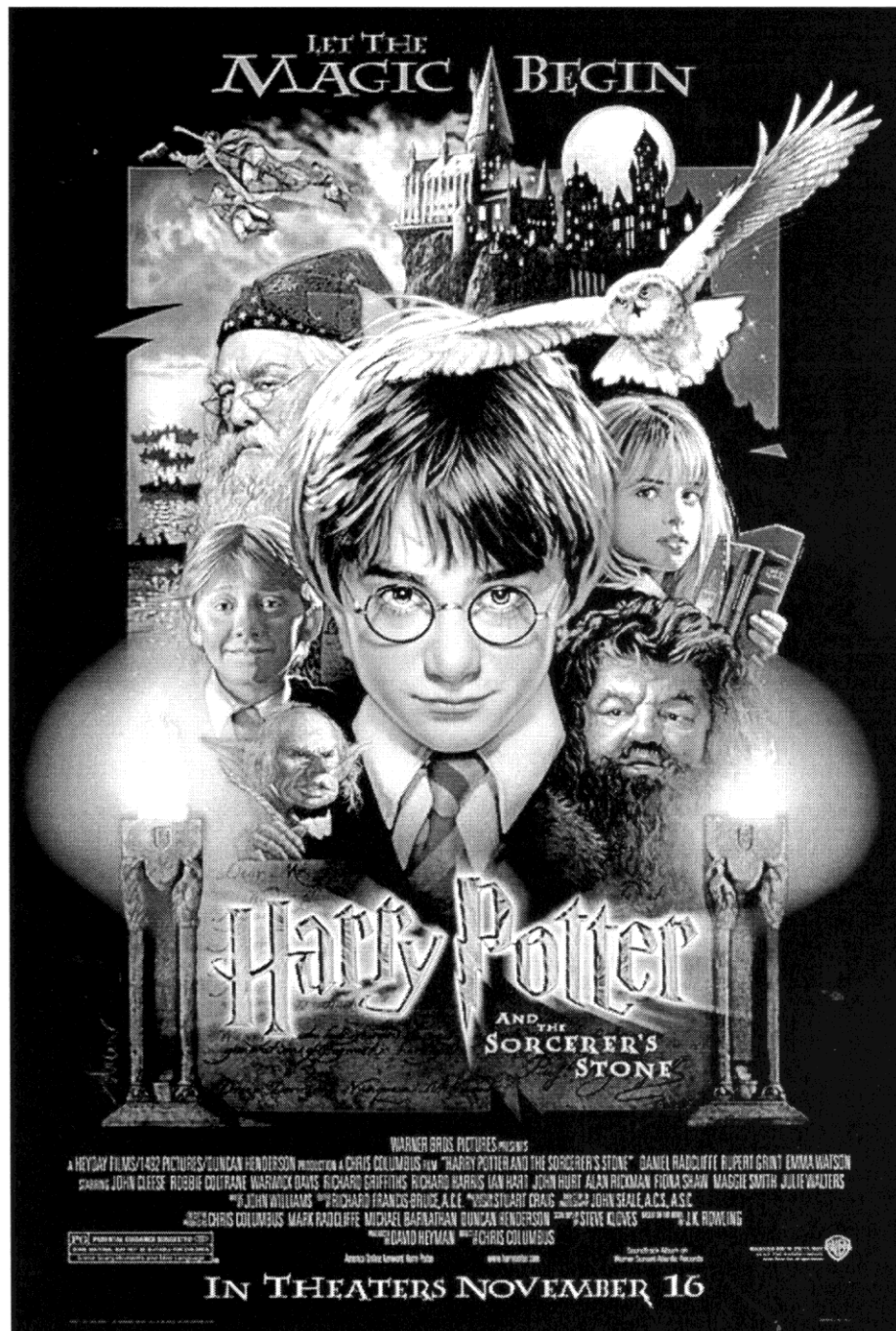
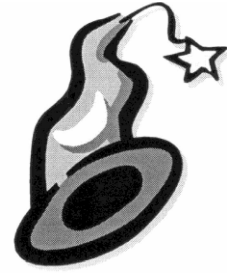


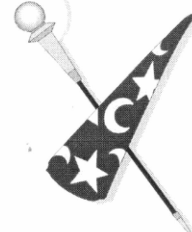
TENNESSEE TRASH #44

There's At Least One Thing To Celebrate This Time!





Tennessee Trash #44 was produced between showings of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by Gary R. Robe. The mail still arrives at P.O. Box 3221 Kingsport, TN 37664, the phone rings at (423) 239-3206, and the e-mail comes to grrobe @ chartertn.net. The Robe Experience has managed to see the movie three times, but only once in its entirety. The film broke during the first show and we missed about five minutes, The second try was much better. When we took my parents, siblings, niece and nephew to see it over Thanksgiving weekend the theater all but lost the dialogue track for almost half the movie and they never got it in focus. Now we get to wait for two more weeks for *The Fellowship of the Ring*! Life is good!



TENNESSEE TRASH #44

A ZINE BY GARY R. ROBE FOR MAILING NUMBER 224 OF THE
SOUTHERN FANDOM PRESS ALLIANCE

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER, 2001

The Joys of International Travel, Timid Halloween, Mysterious White Powders, and Other New World Order Realities...

When I went to Brazil in the days after the attacks, I don't think the airports had really decided what heightened security was yet. When I went to Mexico on October 21st, enough time had elapsed to put the plan into action. The result was more time spent getting on the plane, a couple of funny stories, and no greater sense of security than before.

My last planned trip of the year was to call on a couple of key customers in Mexico and make a presentation to a trade group in Guadalajara. Since I needed to start the trip with a few days in Mexico City, I decided to leave on Saturday and spend the weekend with the Carpenters, the missionary family that I've gotten to know through the mission trip I took in July. This gave me the chance to save some of my travel budget since I didn't need a hotel in Mexico plus, I was able to get a super saver fare for a Saturday stay over. I also got to renew some of the friendships I had established in July. I was especially happy to reunite with Diego Sosa, the four year-old that I really taken to me before. I had been trading e-mail with his parents, Angelica and Ariel, so they knew I was coming.

That Saturday morning was hectic because it was the day of the annual Taekwando tournament sponsored by our school. I decided not to compete because I did not want to risk injury on a day I had to travel.

(What a wimp!) The boys, however, were eager to compete, so we spent the morning practicing forms and kicks. We had been working hard with Isaac on his form for several weeks leading up to the tournament. He is not really enthusiastic about repetitive practice, so perfecting a form is not an easy task for him. When his turn came to perform, he did his form as well as I've ever seen him do it. He was, however, in a large division and he made a few mistakes, so he did not place in the form competition. Nick has been ready to test for red belt for several months, so he did well in forms and took the second-place trophy in his division.

In the fighting competition Nick had only two others in his division, and he drew the bye for the first round. I noticed that Nick takes a while to get started in sparring and that his second bout is often better than his first. He fought well against the boy that took first place. From now on, I plan to make Nick work up a sweat with pads and warm-ups before he fights in competition. Once he is on his game, he is very fast and flexible. As it was, he took the second-place trophy.

Isaac, on the other hand, comes on swinging all-out the moment the command is given. His problem is that he only uses two kicking techniques. If his opponent picks up on that and knows how to counter, then Isaac has trouble. He fought well and even knocked his opponent off his feet a couple of times. The other boy, however, was able to connect with some head kicks and those count double. Isaac still got the second-place trophy for fighting and was quite happy with himself. We can work on diversifying his technique

between now and the state tournament in March.

At least the venue for the tournament was across the street from the airport terminal so I didn't have to worry about being late for my flight. Once again, the security procedures at Tri-Cities International were not greatly changed post 9-11. I guess you could say that they have my profile there since I know all the counter workers there by name and they are accustomed to my exotic travels. The major difference this time was the presence of National Guardsmen in the terminal. At the security checkpoint they had actually reduced the level of vigilance because when I traveled in September they had paddle-type metal detectors in addition to the walk-through gate. This time I only had to walk through the detector and turn my laptop on. Big whoop!

In Atlanta I was surprised that the only change for the connecting flight to Mexico City was that I had to show my passport three times before boarding. They didn't even have tables set up for random checking of carry-on bags that I could see. Once on the plane the main difference I saw was the number of passengers. Normally the flights between Atlanta and Mexico are almost full with an even balance of Americans and Mexicans. This time the plane was at most 60% full and the overwhelming majority of passengers were Mexicans.

Once in Mexico City, going through immigration and customs was faster for me than for the Mexicans. There were so few foreigners entering the country that there was no waiting at the foreign immigration desks. Once I claimed my luggage, I got to put my knowledge of the city to the test. I had to direct the cab driver to the Carpenter's house at night based on my three-month-old memory of the neighborhood. I was happily able to direct the driver in without a hitch!

Once at the Carpenter's home I spent about an hour bringing them up to date on what was happening in the US and getting their point-of-view on the events of the past month. I had brought along some gifts for the Carpenter children, including a couple of Halloween treat bags. They explained that

they do not go Trick-or-Treating in Mexico City. The costumes in Mexico tend to be too morbid for American Missionary tastes. The idea of Trick-or-Treat has definitely caught on in Mexico, and the Carpenters do hand out candy to the kids in the neighborhood. Benjamin and Natasha were however delighted to get a bagful of American sweets to supplement whatever leftovers they could scavenge from the family treat bowl.

On Sunday it was fun to attend the church service and see the friends I had made in July again. One big difference between church services in the US and Mexico is that after the service was over in Mexico most of the people stayed around and talked for an hour after the preaching was over. In July the Sosas were not members of the church. Angelica and Ariel were taking night English classes run by the church, and Diego came to the VBS program. They have since joined the church and we went out for ice cream after the social hour broke up.

Later in the afternoon the Carpenters invited many of the church families to lunch at their house in my honor. I had brought along a boxful of toys and games collected by the church in Tennessee, and we all had a fun afternoon playing with all the new stuff. It is unusual to receive so many new toys at once in Mexico, so this was almost like Christmas for these kids. I ended up playing at the Carpenter's until dark and then went to the Sosa's apartment for dinner. I found out that Diego's favorite type of music is Broadway show tunes, and he demonstrated by dancing to part of *Fiddler on the Roof*. We played until Diego fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

The next morning, I had to take a taxi all the way to the Eastman office. I was again impressed by my knowledge of Mexico City in being able to direct the taxi to the office building. Once there I gave a half-day training class to a group of customers. The plan was for me to make several calls in Mexico City on Monday and then take an early morning flight to Guadalajara for meetings there the rest of the week. As I talked to people in the office about making that morning flight I was not encouraged. They said that the new security measures were adding over an hour to the check-in procedures. That meant that I needed to be at the airport at 5 a.m. for a 7:00 flight. I would need to leave the house at 4 a.m. to make that! Luckily the afternoon appointments in Mexico City were

cancelled so I could change to a Monday evening flight to Guadalajara. All I had to do was change my flight reservation, take a taxi all the way across the city to pick up my luggage at the Carpenter's house, and then ride all the way across the city again to the airport. At least I was doing all this in the middle of the afternoon, so the traffic was not too bad. In my haste to repack my suitcase at the house I inadvertently left behind my blood pressure medicines.

If there was increased security at the Mexico City airport, I certainly didn't see it. They did have a table set up for random luggage inspections, but my number didn't come up. They did ask to see my ticket and passport when I went through the gate security, and they used metal detector paddles in addition to the walk-through detector. That was the extent of high security. Oscar Lagos met me at the Guadalajara airport, and we were able to have dinner at a nice Italian restaurant. This was infinitely preferable to having to get up before breakfast in order to make the morning flight. It got even better the next morning because the entire area was covered with a thick fog and the airport was closed until almost noon. I would not have been a happy camper if I had shown up two hours early for a 7 a.m. flight only to have it cancelled due to weather!

By the end of the day, I knew more about driving in Guadalajara than I probably wanted. Guadalajara is the third largest city in Mexico so the market there is not huge, and the company does not make a lot of effort there. This was only Oscar's third time to visit there as an Eastman employee, so he was not really certain where some of the plants were located. We ended up spending almost as much time finding some of the customers as we did actually talking to them. For added interest, Oscar ran a wheel over a curb and had destroyed one of the hubcaps on the rental car. We made a tour of the junkyard district of Guadalajara trying to find a replacement. Unfortunately, there are not many Ford Contours on the road in Mexico aside from the rental fleet so we could not find a used hubcap.

I also added some complexity by abandoning my blood pressure medication in Mexico City. I discovered that Mexican pharmacies did not carry the exact prescriptions that I use. I take a beta blocker called *Toprol* and was completely unknown in Mexico and a diuretic called hydrochlorothiazole that was only available mixed with another diuretic. I crossed my fingers and substituted *Atenolol* for the beta blocker since I had taken that before and took the combo diuretic. The funny thing is that at home the beta blocker is an expensive non-generic and the HCTZ is a cheap generic. In Mexico a month's worth of the beta

blocker was \$3.50 and 15 doses of the diuretic was \$19. At least I was able to keep my blood pressure under control. By the way, all of these medicines were sold over-the-counter in Mexico.

At the end of the week, I got to finally see full-blown airport security. In the past when I have connected to an international flight from a regional airport, I have been checked through to my destination. This time I could only check from Guadalajara to Mexico City. Once there I had to re-claim my luggage, walk the whole length of the Mexico City airport, and the check in for the international segment.

The international terminal at the Mexico City airport is divided into three sections for different airlines. Delta, Continental, and Aeromexico share one of these bays. Each airline had their own pre-check-in security set up. I had to pass all my luggage through an X-ray unit and then have my computer bag physically searched. At the check-in counter there was another search table set up where they went through my largest suitcase. Once through these checkpoints the actual procedure of obtaining a boarding pass was about the same. At the gate the metal detector and X-ray procedure was about as usual.

By the time I had made it through all these measures most of my 90-minute layover was gone and they were boarding my flight. At the gate they physically searched all carry-on luggage. They were confiscating all cigarette lighters, matches, and anything pointy. They were not confiscating pens and pencils, which can be as deadly as knives if you know how to use them. Once through the baggage search, they went over the passengers once again with metal detector paddles and a frisking. With one final check of my passport, I was then allowed to board the plane.

A funny thing happened a few minutes before takeoff. Some of the security people came on the plane and sought out a lady sitting across the aisle from me. They asked for her documents, and she produced them. They were quite relieved when they found her ticket envelope. After all that security they had forgotten to tear her ticket off the boarding pass! Oh, well they are still working the bugs out of the system.

I had to deal with something unusual on the trip back from Mexico, jet lag! Normally there is only a one-hour time difference between most of Mexico and Eastern Time. I discovered, however, that Mexico changes to Standard Time three weeks before the US, so the time difference was two hours. It is amusing because the only reason Mexico adopts Daylight Savings Time is to coordinate with the US. I would like to know who

the genius is who decided to change time in Mexico on a different schedule!

What is All This Security Getting Us?

From what I have been reading over the past weeks I conclude that the security checks I saw in Mexico are the shape of things to come. From what I can see our leaders have succumbed to the call to Do Something without accomplishing much. To be sure, there have been no airplane hijackings since September 11, but what does that prove? My feeling is that there have been no incidents because nobody has tried.

It will be interesting to see how the current situation plays out as the airlines push back from the new measures imposed by the government. The security bill that was pushed through Congress was not written with a great deal of thought. From what I can see all that has been done is to add a few new layers of security checks and to pay more attention to checked baggage. By my experience they really don't want laptop computers carried on to planes, although nobody wants to take the liability for handling them as checked baggage. In my mind a laptop computer is one of the greatest anti-terrorist weapons you can have on a plane. I don't imagine that a hijacker would have a lot of spiz left after getting whomped up side the head with a Dell!

Of course, the government would like us to go back to being obedient sheep and let the Sky Marshals disarm the bad guys. Right. Like we are ever going to see enough Sky Marshals on flights to be a deterrent. I think one reason we haven't seen new hijackings is because the bad guys have not figured out a way around passenger uprisings (besides hiding in Afghan caves!). The best they can do with the new mentality is to blow up the plane in flight. Of course, if that is true then the new security measures on baggage handling may actually forestall the most likely kind of attacks for the near future.

Speaking of the war effort, can you believe the luck that Dubya has gotten in the last two months? Here we were going into Afghanistan, of all places, fighting an entrenched and popular regime with a few

thousand very untrustworthy ex-drug smugglers as front-line troops. Seven weeks later what is left of the Taliban is hiding in caves, the various Afghan ethnic groups are sitting together in a German resort and apparently rationally deciding how to peacefully run the country, and we have a couple thousand Marines on the ground in Kandahar and apparently the locals are saying c'mon in and take out those rascals that led our fair country astray? Afghanistan? The same place that has spit out every invader from Alexander the Great to Britain to the USSR?

Meanwhile at home Dubya has Vladimir Putin eating out of his hand and thumbing their noses at OPEC production quotas? I realize that Reagan and Gorbachev got along well enough, but since when does the US President gaze into the Russian President's soul and decided they are best buds? Andrew Lloyd Webber is going to have to write a musical about this because nobody could ever believe it as a true story.

The only real sour note in the whole opera is John (What Bill of Rights?) Ashcroft who is orchestrating the greatest revocation of civil liberties since The Civil War. One thing the administration had shown is arrogance in deciding what is good for us and how much to let us know. "Go about your normal lives but stay at the highest level of alert and tell us if you see your neighbors doing anything suspicious." It may be *Taliban on the Run* over there, but what have we done to ourselves here?

We thought we knew how lucky Dubya was before all this happened. We didn't know half of it! Whether or not we catch bin Laden now, we have a big military victory under our belts with very light US military losses. George W. is also lucky that the economy sent south in his first year in office. This was even if nothing is done, natural forces will lift us out of the recession by election time. In fact at the moment, it looks like the government doing nothing may be the best way to play it. Bush will be able to say that he tried to act but the Democrats blocked him. That way, if the economy improves, he can take the credit and blame the Democrats at the same time. Is the guy lucky or what?

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

I don't believe that I have ever anticipated the premiere of a movie as much as I did *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I remember being excited about the release of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Return of the Jedi* enough to stand in line at the Bellemeade Theater in Nashville. I never, however, dressed up in a purple robe with fake beard and purple pointy hat to see either of those. I did for *HFATSS*!

As the release date neared, the local theaters began to sell advance tickets on Monday. Corlis tried to get tickets at the best theater in the area, the Cinemark 14, when their box office opened on Monday, but they had not yet decided at what time and in what theater the first show was going to be run. I went later that night to the Tri-Cities 7, a less fancy but much closer theater and got tickets for their first show at 5:00 p.m. I took two hours of vacation that afternoon to get there on time.

Both boys dressed in their Harry Potter costumes and convinced me to put on my Dumbledore outfit. We arrived at the theater 45 minutes early and got prime seats. There were several people that we knew in the theater, so we had a fun time asking each other Potter trivia until showtime. Someone who had seen an advance showing warned us not to drink anything before the movie started. There would be no good opportunity to pee for 2 ½ hours.

On the whole I must say that they did an excellent job of bringing the story to the screen. I imagine that it must have been excruciating deciding what had to be left out in order to fit it all into the time limitations. The best part of the film was the casting. I thought that each actor brought their characters to life just as I imagined them. The three principal kids were excellent, although they didn't give Daniel Radcliffe enough dialogue to really bring out Harry's depth. The absolute triumph of casting was getting Alan Rickman to play Snape. He was always my first choice for the part, and he brought it off magnificently.

One element of the film that left me cold was a surprise. I expected great things from John Williams' soundtrack, but after seeing the movie three times, the music has not grown on me. For one thing, the soundtrack was mixed in so loud at times it overwhelmed the dialogue. The main problem, however, was that the music was hardly original. Oh, yes there was the catchy theme tune but that was repeated so many times through the film that it became tiresome. More disturbing was Williams' constant borrowing from earlier works. I picked out motifs that came from *ET*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Star Wars*, and more. Seemingly John Williams has run out enough new musical ideas to fill a whole soundtrack. It is hard to believe that the composer who has written themes for everything from *Lost in Space* to *Schindler's List* has run dry, but there it is.

The weakest part of the film was the breakneck pace and the lost depth of the story. It was difficult for me to gauge exactly how much was lost because I am so familiar with the books that I found myself mentally filling in bits that were left out. I have talked to four people who have seen the movie but never read any of the books. Three loved the movie and were planning to read the books ASAP. The fourth thought the story was not much more than a glorified D&D scenario and didn't see what all the fuss was about. I am looking forward to the DVD release next year to see all the deleted scenes. I have heard that the Hogwarts School Song, Peeves the Poltergeist, Quidditch practice, and more all were left behind on the cutting room floor.

We're Red Belts Now

Corlis and I were both taken a bit by surprise when Master Grosso told us in early November that we were all ready to take the red belt test. When we first started taking Taekwondo red belt seemed to be an unachievable goal. Now, 2 ½ years later we are there. It is now hard to imagine not practicing martial arts!

The first hurdle to achieving red belt is mastering Form Taeguk Seven. This is a very tricky and complex set of moves that has taken six months to get right. Unlike the other forms to date, this one requires the

balance of a mountain goat and the grace of ballet at the same time. As the students advance, the standards for the forms also get tougher. You have to be able to instinctively fall into the various stances. There is nothing instinctive about the poses known as “L” stance, cat stance and “X” stance. The trick is that you have to make them look natural.

Along with the form, we had to memorize and perform 32 self-defense forms. These are designed to do anything from kicking an opponent to breaking the neck. There are 16 separate techniques that have to be executed from either the right or left side, depending on how your opponent is coming at you. For the test you first have to demonstrate all the techniques consecutively. The instructor then calls out moves at random and you have to perform them without hesitation.

Once forms and self-defense is passed, you have to demonstrate all of the kicking and punching techniques that are covered in class. This is done in shadow-boxing style without an opponent and in a sparring match with an opponent. As you advance through the belt levels, the requirements for sparring increase. At the beginning you fight only a two-minute match. For red belt you have worked up to two three-minute rounds. That's a lot of fighting. Also, if you don't at least show at least five styles of kicks, the instructor can force the match to continue. I was careful to work in some of the more energetic styles like spinning hook and back kick early so that I didn't have to demonstrate them later.

I fought a guy with a black stripe red belt, that is, one step below black belt. I had actually fought Brandon before in my very first sparring match when I tested for my yellow stripe white belt. We have both come a long way in form and technique since then. He got in one kick to my head, and I landed a couple of spinning hook kicks. I was tired but not exhausted at the end of six minutes of sparring. I remember back to that first test and how devastated I was with two minutes of fighting!

The last bit of the test is breaking. This is not something you get to practice since the instructor tells you during the test what

break you will attempt. For the red belt I had to do a flying side kick. That is, I had to jump over two punching bags laid side-by-side on the floor, swivel in mid-air, and land a side kick on a board being held at chest level. Nick and Isaac went before me and broke on the first try. I generally don't like flying kicks because I have the grace of a three-legged water buffalo, but this time I got it just right and made the break on the first time. Corlis had a bit more trouble and missed on her first try. On the second run she made the break and also had an interesting bruise to show off from where her foot slid off the edge of the board on her first try.

From this point it will probably take about six to eight months before we are ready to test for black stripe, then ten to twelve months more to prepare for black belt. That is a daunting thought. If my body holds up, I will have to write an essay on some aspect of martial arts, perform all eight forms plus the black belt form, 36 self-defense techniques, basic hapkido and an escape from a rear bear hug, ten minutes of one-on-one sparring, a four-way combination break, a concrete block break, and two-on-one sparring to exhaustion. I will also pay \$300 for the privilege of enduring this test. When it is done, however, my name will be recorded in the Korean master book of Taekwondo black belts, and I will get a certificate attesting to the achievement that is accepted at any serious school anywhere in the world. I just hope my joints hold out!

MAILING COMMENTS

***The Southerner* #223: Jeffrey Copeland**—I'm sorry to see that Trinlay Khadro seems to have dropped out after one mailing. I hope that she catches up and stays with us.

***The New Port News* 199: Ned Brooks**—I know one person who would love to have *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* action figures—my son Isaac. *Holy Grail* is probably his favorite movie. I don't know what that says about my parenting skills to let an 8-year-old watch such stuff, but there it is. When Master Grosso catches young students not paying attention in class he calls gives them an extra "training opportunity", that is, 20-30 squat thrusts with a jump done after class. Isaac is a frequent recipient of training opportunities. It turns out that Master Grosso and Scott Turner, one of the senior black belts are both Python fans. When Master Grosso recently meted out extra training to Isaac, my son piped up with "Help! Help! I'm being repressed! Come see the violence inherent in the system!" Master Grosso's jaw just dropped, and Scott just about wet his pants. It was perfect.

***Twigdrasil and Treehouse Gazette* #12: Richard Dengrove**—Well it may not have been The Devil bedeviling my travel plans, but with all the problems I ran into planning the trip it certainly felt like something was working against me! You got it right with comparing the preaching at the mission church with Bible Belt sermonizing. Of course, a missionary church is quite a bit different from what I am accustomed to. Most of the members of the church are either recent converts to Christianity or have moved from Catholicism, which places much less emphasis on personal responsibility than a Protestant church.

Simultaneous translation is a very tricky thing and is not something that I would attempt without knowing what the other person was going to say. Steve was helped in that he knew the liturgical vocabulary that would have given me fits. The same would apply to a preacher trying to translate one of my technical talks. You can really help the

translator if you are familiar with the language by choosing words that translate more easily. In English we have many cases where we have "47 words for snow" that all have slightly different meaning. Often by using basic concepts and avoiding details the translation job is much easier.

The City Paper's parody of Chandra Levy coverage may have missed the mark, but Chandra-as-Nancy was right on target!

***Variations on a Theme* #8: Richard Lynch**—*Scheherazade* will always hold a special place for me in the classical repertoire. It was the first piece I ever heard from a live orchestra. I'll never forget the chilling feeling of hearing what a violin actually sounded like after all those years of hearing recordings. The only other thing I can think of that comes close was the first time I ate fresh shrimp after a lifetime of eating frozen. *Scheherazade* is also one of the best examples of musical painting around. You can almost feel the pitching of the ship at sea and the adventures of the swashbuckling prince without ever referring to the liner notes. It is a gaudy piece, but lovable.

Last year the boy's school studied Beethoven and specifically the writing of the 9th Symphony. They did not, however, listen to a recording in class. I corrected that oversight. My recording is by Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony on Telarc. It was fun guiding the boys through the movements of the symphony, pointing out things that were happening. Then, in the fourth movement, hearing the themes from the earlier movements restated and then swept away by the "horror" theme. Then, finally there is the quiet introduction of the "Ode" theme, almost sneaking in and then taking over. The defining moment of the whole work for me is the fugue near the end of the fourth movement, the last passage of the symphony in a minor key. As the fugue resolves, we are left with a sad repeating chord stripped down to no more than a rhythm. Then, with nothing more than shifting one note in the bass line, Beethoven suddenly converts to a major key and triumphantly recapitulates the "Ode" theme. It is one of the

moments in music that can make me tear up just thinking about it.

Yikes! You were close enough to the Pentagon to see the smoke! That is way too close! The son of one of my sparring partners is in the Army and stationed in Virginia. He was put on rescue/recovery duty at the Pentagon and got to shake hands with President Bush on September 13. One of the most horrifying aspects of the 9-11 attacks is that so many people were involved that there is hardly an American that doesn't have a direct connection with someone who was at or near one of the sites.

I am happy to say that three of my patents have been actively practiced. One was for a temporary anti-corrosion coating for pipelines that my old employer Kendall is still making as far as I know. Another is for a yellow dye to replace heavy metal pigments in road marking compounds. It is not a huge seller, but Eastman is making it. The one I'm proudest of, using cellulose esters as an anti-clumping coating for pressure sensitive adhesives, is being used by several customers right now. In all I've had seven patents that have come from my work during my career and three of them are in practice. That's a pretty good batting average!

Spiritus Mundi #185: Guy H. Lillian III—Were you feeling prophetic when you wrote the line “Tomorrow they will live in fear” in your last mailing? I expected that our vengeance would be a real downer for The Taliban and Osama bin Laden, but would you have expected it to come so quickly? OK we don't have bin Laden yet, but I never would have predicted that we would have come this far this quickly. It reminds me of the way Saddam Hussein's much touted Republican Guard folded in the Gulf War once they came under fire. How interesting that the Afghans have suddenly discovered that The Taliban was controlling their country by using foreigners like bin Laden!

The best thing to come from the mission trip for me is that I now have people I consider like family in Mexico City. Until now I had colleagues that I worked closely with, but that is not like the relationship I have with The Sosas or the Romos. (Oh, yeah, I admit I do not mind the hugs and kisses from my “fan club” among the female customer service reps in the Mexico City office!) It is a completely different feeling to come into the city and end the trip at someone's house instead of a hotel. It was a lot of fun coming back in October and having

that gang of kids surround me wanting me to put on the act that entertained them so much in July.

Peter, Pan, and Merry #39: David Schlosser—

The baseball season just kept getting better as the playoffs went on. I really didn't expect Atlanta to make it to The Series. I actually didn't *want* them to, only to get creamed by The Yankees once again. The Braves were not the team to beat The Yankees, but (miracles do happen!) The Diamondbacks were! And what a series it was! Two games decided by come-from-behind home runs in the bottom of the ninth inning! The Yankee meltdown in Game 6. The pitching of Curt Schilling, Randy Johnson, Roger Clemens and others kept the games tight and exciting. The only World Series I can really compare with it is the 1991 matchup between The Braves and The Twins.

If only MLB could have let the magic go a week without spoiling it with the announcement of the contraction. I suppose that the contraction was inevitable, but couldn't they have waited a little while before announcing it? The problem is that MLB seems determined to shoot itself in the feet. For that they deserve the bad fortune that has befallen the game. Another sour note is that you can't buy a Diamondbacks T-shirt anywhere in the Tri-cities area.

I have finally joined the “under 200” cholesterol club thanks to my doctor putting me on Zocor two months ago. My cholesterol has always been 280 no matter what I do with my diet or exercise. This summer I finally found a combination of medicines that got my blood pressure under control, so my doctor decided to attack the cholesterol next. On my last checkup my level had fallen from 280 to 185 after only two months on the medicine. My triglyceride level, however, was still way too high (700 when normal is 100). It was high enough for my doctor to ask if diabetes runs in my family (it doesn't). My blood sugar level was fine, even low, but the triglyceride level was still elevated. I will stay on Zocor for three more months and then get re-tested. If it hasn't improved by then, I will probably get switched to Lipitor. That is supposed to be better at lowering all blood lipids, not just cholesterol, but my insurance company insists that Zocor be tried first before it will approve Lipitor.

Trivial Pursuits #97: Janice Gelb—You certainly struck a chord when you say that the September 11 attacks have taught America how it feels to live in

Israel. Even when our embassies in Africa were bombed, the USS Cole was attacked, or the army barracks in Saudi were bombed, I don't think that terrorism was ever real to the bulk of Americans. I am glad to see that the only one who seems to be slipping completely into paranoia is John Ashcroft. Unfortunately, he sets the tone for a lot of the nation.

In the past weeks I've heard some accusations directed at the US that we have become terrorists ourselves in our zeal to bomb The Taliban. That is bunk, because there is a basic difference between a terrorist and a nation at war. My definition of a terrorist is someone that has to sneak, hide, or self-destruct in order to hit his target. For instance, The Palestinians justify their terrorist acts by saying that Israel is just as bad as they are. Sorry, Arafat breath, there is a big difference. When the US or Israel comes after you, you KNOW who is coming after you. We have real tanks, planes, cannons, and daisy-cutters. Anyone who has to hide behind car bombs and suicide is *de facto* a terrorist.

Yes, I did tour the Floating Gardens still dressed in the grungy clothes from the street soccer game. Furthermore, the stain never came out of the shirt I was wearing. That was some tough dirt. The subscription to the Hart County Herald has been much more amusing than I would have thought it would be.

Frequent Flyer: Tom Feller—I'm sorry to hear about Anita's mother. I hope that Anita and Cecilia can get through disposing of the estate without too many problems. There are so many emotions involved at a time like this it is difficult to keep a cool head.

It sounds like you should have just kept the rental car and driven back to Nashville! It would have been quicker and less stressful. I saw a statistic a while ago that October was the US airline's best month ever for on-time departures. Since fewer planes are flying with fewer passengers, air traffic control has gotten easier. I guess there is a upside to everything.

Yes, the sinking of the *Maine* was a closer analogy, but in terms of casualties and damage, only Pearl Harbor comes close. By the way, some time ago there was a report in *Science News* on the sinking of the *Maine*. It is still sitting on the bottom of the harbor where it sunk and a group of forensic specialists visited the wreck to try and determine if the explosion was a mine or the ship's own magazine

exploding. They concluded that even with modern investigation techniques they could not determine what really happened. The wreck is in fairly good shape. The problem is that there is evidence for both an external and internal explosion. We may never know the truth.

Yes, I believe that Catholics are true Christians. There are, however, some irresolvable doctrinal issues between Catholic and Protestant views that probably will never go away. The differences are not worth fighting over and I sincerely hope it never comes to that despite what some Protestant fundamentalists may espouse. I do not think that Protestant evangelists should spend time trying to convert Catholics. There are plenty of non-Christians out there that should be a first priority.

Saying that, what was I doing in Mexico passing out VBS invitations in a Catholic neighborhood? First, there are plenty of nonbelievers in Mexico that should be included in an evangelistic effort. Then there is the problem of lapsed Catholics. There are millions of people in Mexico that are nominally Catholic but have either decided not to practice or give only lip-service to religion. The main sticking point is birth control. In the US, the priesthood tends to look the other way on birth control. In Mexico the priesthood is adamantly opposed to any form of birth control. Many people in Mexico can no longer justify belonging to a church that either expects them to abstain from sex or raise a family they cannot support.

Avatar Press #17: Randy B. Cleary—AHA! Another *Buffy* fan in SFPA besides me and George! What do you think of the twists in the new season, especially with the Musical episode? I thought that *Buffy: The Musical* was brilliant. For the first time in history the actors in a musical had a real reason to sing! They even managed to incorporate some major plot turns into the musical, and the characters didn't just wake up at the end of it from a dream. They remember singing and dancing out their deepest secrets. If that was not enough, there are the revelations in last week's episode where it appears if Buffy came back from the dead without a soul.

We did not get *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* broadcasts in our region until the fourth season, so Corlis and I are now appreciating the syndication of the series of Fx. We have finally seen the first and second season reruns. I feel like I did when the Nashville NBC affiliate hated *Star Trek* so much that they sis not run the show until the third season. Until the show

went into afternoon syndication in the mid-70's my only impression of *Star Trek* was the third season, and I couldn't understand what the fuss was about!

Ynvi is a Louse and Other Graffitos #73 and 74: T.K. F. Weisskopf—In Issue #73 you gave a good list of science periodicals that an aspiring SF writer might subscribe to. For your information, you got the one for *Science News* wrong. It is not a British publication as you said. *Science News* is published weekly by Science Service, a Washington DC based non-profit organization. Although *Science News* is a pretty thin publication (16 pages per week) it is certainly high in content and more than worth its current \$54.50 a year subscription price. I have subscribed for about 25 years. It is the only subscription renewal notice that I always send back in return mail for as long as they will let me buy at a time (2 years). All issues of the magazine published since 1995 are also available in PDF format on CD-ROM. That should be a required item for a hard SF writer's library!

On to Issue #74. Your thoughts on 9-11 on page 4 are just about what I've said or thought elsewhere. Mine were just not as well stated.

Thanks to Charlotte for her review of *Passage*. I generally pick up Connie Willis' books as soon as they come out. I will be looking for *Passage* at the next Huxter Room I get to.

Randy's Hugo Award Report In Pictures was great!

Actually, the doors were not all that well marked. The sign was the size of an oversized post card, and not that obvious until you were looking for it. I didn't even notice the signs until we had covered most of the neighborhood. By that time, I knew that we were being welcomed at almost all the houses we were visiting, so I did not feel so bad about knocking. Yes, it was uncomfortable going door-to-door handing out Christian propaganda. That was way out of my comfort zone. It was not something I would have chosen to do, nor was it something I felt comfortable doing—at first. Later, as we were welcomed into the houses and greeted with curiosity and friendliness, I felt better about it. I felt much better about it when I saw some of the kids the next week at the VBS program. They had a ball making crafts, singing, and playing with other kids. If we stay inside our comfort zone, we run the risk of never learning.

Thanks for including the clipping *Idiot Procf*. I had wondered what that CE symbol was on consumer goods and figured that it was something like the familiar UL symbol. The fact that Europe has legislated itself out of innovation and new business creation is both sad and not surprising. Remember this is the place that makes producers responsible for their products as long as they remain in existence no matter how products are used or abused and whether they can be traced back to a manufacturer. We may complain that good old US products can't compete with countries that don't consider environmental impacts, but remember that there is a big part of the world (Europe and Japan) that make American environmentalism look like the public relations office of DuPont.

Shocked and Sleepless With the Armadillo #49: Liz Copland—Alas, the cheap leather can probably only be bought in bulk from wholesalers. The difference in price is the middleman's cut!

The Modern World #53: Jeffrey Copeland—You wrote that the chairmen of American and United Airlines should be locked up as accessories in the attacks. I agree that the airlines are the main culprits in the laxity of airport security, yet at this point they have not taken much of the blame. Most of the had fallen on the security contractors *that the airlines hired!* Most of the press has been sympathetic for the poor airlines who are losing so much money because you and I aren't flying enough! I'm sorry, but as a frequent flier I feel about as much sympathy for an airline as I do for my cable TV company! They know they are sitting on an essential service that's not going to go away. This was highlighted in *Dilbert* in the last few days as Dogbert decided to run an airline without having actual airplanes. American, United, Delta, UA Air, etc. will go on in some form because they are the ones who have the planes. What's going to happen? Is Citibank going to repossess the planes and start flying them? I somehow doubt it. I suspect that if anyone tries to start a class action lawsuit against the airlines for September 11, the government will step in in somehow and make it all go away.

Well, that's about enough trees killed this time around for this frivolity. Best holiday wishes to all, and I'll be back again in January.