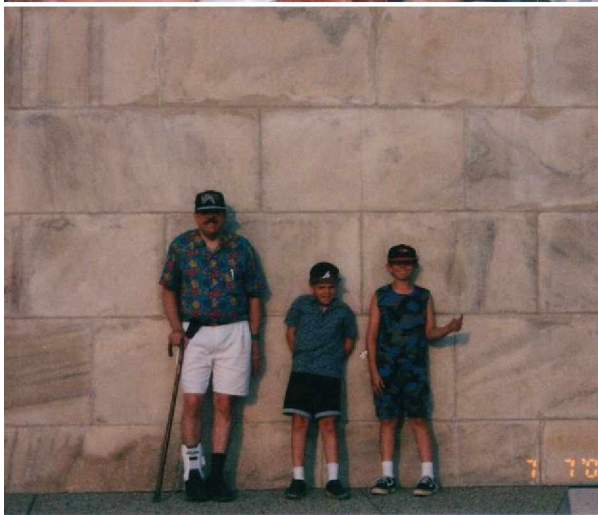
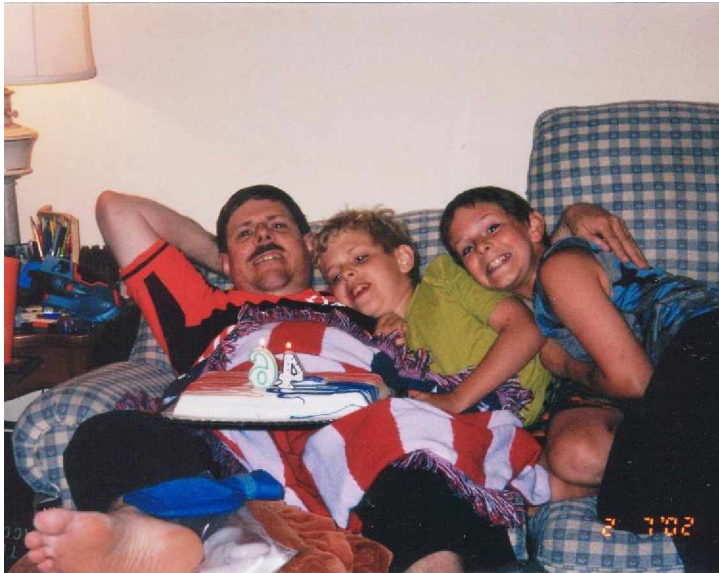


TENNESSEE TRASH #47

On The Mall With The Robe Experience



Tennessee Trash # 47 was produced by Gary R. Robe while watching the afternoon thunderstorms in Mexico City and P.O. Box 3221, Kingsport, TN 37663. International dialing codes are not necessary to reach us at (423) 239-3106 but it might take a small act of God to catch us at home. E-mail is also occasionally received at grrobe@chartertn.net.

The pictures on the front are as follows, left to right, top to bottom:

Gimpy Birthday: I had to hold the cake on my chest after spraining my ankle

Hope Diamond: Isaac is spellbound in the reflection of some insignificant piece of crystallized carbon

Up Against Washington: The three Robe boys hold up the east wall of the Washington Monument

Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns: Nuff said.

Foot Fountain: Corlis and the boys soak their feet in the National Sculpture Garden fountain

Gem Mining: A fun afternoon at a do-it-yourself gem mine near Boone, NC. This was a 90 minute drive from home and much fun for all

TENNESSEE TRASH #47

A ZINE BY GARY R. ROBE FOR MAILING NUMBER 227 OF THE
SOUTHERN FANDOM PRESS ALLIANCE

JUNE-JULY, 2002

Convention Hopping, Hobbled Vacation, Mexican Two-Step and Other Dances for One Foot...

The beginning of June brought us to the highly anticipated convention season with two we planned to attend in the space of three weeks. These were DSC 48 in Huntsville and Midwestcon in Florence, KY. Corlis was especially keen on going to the conventions since she was beginning to go a bit stir-crazy in Kingsport. In the first week of June we had another visit to Isaac's cardiologist for a progress report. The news there was good with most of the heart damage gone. He still has one valve that is not closing completely, but the doctor explained that that may take years to heal or may never go away. He did allow Isaac, after four more weeks of restricted activity, to resume normal activity. We do not have to return to the cardiologist for three months. With that we can hopefully put the rheumatic fever episode behind us. Having lived through three months of having to balance Isaac's convalescence with teaching, my travels, and the daily routine, Corlis was more than ready for a break.

In order to get the most out of the weekend I arranged to work four 10-hour days so that we could leave early on Friday morning. With the time change we arrived in Huntsville at 1 p.m. only to find out that the hotel was enforcing a strict 3 p.m. check-in. There was not much of the convention going when we arrived although plenty of familiar faces were wandering the hallways. We decided to go to the Alabama Space and Rocket Center to kill

time until check-in and to allow us to concentrate on the convention for the rest of the weekend.

Predictably the boys loved the museum and had to be herded out at closing time. They especially liked the Olympus Mons climbing wall and the teleoperation demos they had set up. We also enjoyed the IMAX theater although the boys, being connoisseurs, were disappointed that the show was not in 3-D. The exhibit they spent the most time with was, to my surprise, the SR-71 Blackbird they had mounted in front of the museum.

By the time we returned to the hotel Rickey Sheppard, his S.O. Betsy Hirst, and her daughter Jackie had arrived. We all went out to dinner at the Guadalajara Mexican Restaurant and caught up on the news and gossip that had accumulated since Concave. By the time we returned to the hotel it was time for the parties to get started. The most notable of these were the LA in '06 bid party, the Xerpes party, and the Baen Books party in Toni's room. The conversation soon turned to who should get the Rubble Award this year. I was tempted to campaign for Hank Reinhart for adding yet another initial to Toni's name, but we arrived on an even better idea. The most memorable event of the evening was seeing Toni vault over the back of a sofa at a snarky comment from Hank. The other memory of the night was Naomi urging everyone to buy a drink from the bar at the dance.

Naomi had managed to negotiate out of having to have a banquet to get a break on the function space, but the payback was that

they had to have a cash bar at the dance. The problem was that the dance was deserted, and the bar was not doing any business. It came to the point that if they could just do \$120 more bar business the convention could avoid \$1500 in function room charges. Just before closing, one generous fan bought \$120 in beer for the parties to close the gap.

We ended up in the LA bid party in the wee hours helping to reduce the surplus beer population. By this time Pat and Naomi were trying to decide to actually visit the room they had taken for the weekend for the first time or to just go home for a while. Going home won out since they had to go there anyhow. In the crush of getting the convention underway they had not had the time to pack a change of clothes. We all reluctantly decided that we needed the sleep and called it a night.

The next morning, I ****shudder**** attended programming. This was not due to any tendency on my part to go sercon in my dotage. It was because I had been placed on three panels in the program. They were on the secrets of running a long-lasting convention, DSC awards and anti-awards, and the History of the Wigwam Village DSC Bid. I was surprised when the panels actually drew a crowd, especially the one of convention running that was scheduled at 10 p.m.! After sitting through more than three hours of programming, I feel that I have done my share of it for at least a couple of years. Even more scary was that Tom Feller was videotaping the proceedings, so I suppose that there is even a semi-permanent record of what was said at these events.

I was happy to see the number of people attending the panels on Southern Fandom history. When I saw the program, I was afraid that we would be talking to an empty room or a group of nothing but old pharts like me. I was glad to see that there was a healthy spectrum of attendees at the panels although I didn't see any college-age people there. Once again it seemed that the younger generation was hanging out in the game rooms and video program but was not mixing in much with the traditional SF crowd.

For lunch on Saturday, we discovered Stanleo's Deli a few blocks away from the hotel. They served some huge and delicious hot sandwiches. The only bad thing about it was that they are a Huntsville tradition, so we couldn't convince them to open a branch in Kingsport.

On Saturday afternoon we had the SFPA party in Toni's room with the traditional DSC one-shot production. I brought along some Peruvian liquor that made a rather exotic drink called a Pisco Sour. I have become addicted to these when visiting Peru and was anxious to see if I could duplicate the effect myself. The ones I made were a bit sourer than the ones I've had in Peru, but the end result was about the same. The recipe was more complex than most of the drinks I attempt, requiring a blender, half-strength gelatin water, egg whites, sugar, limes, and Pisco. The person that was most excited with the recipe was Anne Winston. She has had a bottle of Pisco for several years and had no idea what to do with it.

In the meantime, the Robe sons amused themselves by seeing how many balloons they could float in the slipstream of the air conditioner. The only part of the convention that they really enjoyed was the hotel pool. There were not any other children there of their age, so they were quite bored. They kept hoping for a return trip to The Rocket Center, but we were simply too busy for that.

After the SFPA party came the GoH speeches and the award ceremony. The guest speeches were entertaining, especially when Vincent di Fate told a story about a time where he was supposed to attend a conference in Minnesota and got sent to the wrong Tri-Cities airport by mistake. There are actually three airports in the country that call themselves Tri-Cities. He got sent to the one in Tennessee. When I went up to present the Rubble Award, I handed Vincent one of my business cards and told him that I doubted he would ever make that mistake again, but if he did he could give us a call and we could put him up for the night.

I was not sure how the target for this year's Rubble Award would take it, but Guy assured me that she would accept it in good fun. We

gave it to Rosie on the grounds that she had turned Guy from a windbag to a giddy windbag. As I handed the traditional Krystal value meal to Rosie, Allen Steele commented that one of the things he misses most since moving to Massachusetts is Krystals. For the second time in its history, the Krystals actually were eaten although this time not by the initial recipient.

On Sunday morning I got up with the boys and took them to the pool while Corlis slept in. We got to the pool just as Naomi was finishing her morning swim. She urged us to go to the business meeting as she had information that someone was going to try some politicking with the rules. I let the boys swim until the sun was hitting the pool and then scooted them inside for the meeting. I'm not sure what was being threatened, but the meeting seemed to go off like normal with the only point of controversy being whether or not to allow the huxters to vote. As it was, I don't think the inclusion of the dealers made much difference because Memphis won handily.

After the business meeting Guy, Rickey and I were on a panel recounting the Legend of the Wigwam Village bid. One of the saddest things about the 1995 DSC was that they did not tape the business meeting so the memories of Rickey's presentation are left only to those who were in the room. Guy brought out that there are actually three Wigwam Villages left in operation. I was only aware of the ones in Cave City, KY and Williams, AZ, but apparently there is another one somewhere in California that is still in business too.

We managed to pack quite a lot into the DSC weekend what with meals with friends, parties, panels, and other frivolity. We ended up with another lunch at Stanleo's with George Wells and Richard Dengrove. We got a rather late start back home, so the boys conked out about halfway there. It was a quiet ride. The boys liked the space museum so much that their main question on the way back was not "Are we there yet?" but "When can we go back?"

Speaking of getting back, the DSC marked the return of Rickey Sheppard to active

Fandom. In years past Rickey has shown up only briefly at Concaves and the last Rivercon. He has been very busy with Masonic activities, but with his relationship with Betsy getting closer that is changing. Masonic meetings are a Guys Only thing, and Betsy prefers fannish gatherings to getting left at home on the weekends. I am glad that Tom included some programming for Rickey to participate in because that seems to have gotten him, at least for the moment, interested in getting back into Fandom.

Two weeks later I went through the same drill at work so we could leave early for Midwestcon. Last year the convention moved, for the first time in many years, into Northern Kentucky instead of Northern Cincinnati. This cuts off over an hour of driving to reach the site. The hotel is a rather decrepit Ramada Inn, but the patio around the pool in the central courtyard is an excellent setting. Midwestcon turned out to be more fun for the boys than DSC because Steven Chalker and Alex Sinclair were there. This provided a critical mass of four boys about the same age. That's enough to form a gang. They played in the pool and had Cartoon Network parties in our room until the wee hours.

For me Midwestcon is the only time I get to see Jack and Eva Chalker, Mike and Christa Sinclair, and Andy and Jodie Offutt during the year, so it is always an enjoyable weekend. On Saturday morning we went en masse to the Newport Aquarium. That at least kept us out of the sun during the heat of the day. The weather at Midwestcon can be a roll of the dice. Since part of the tradition is to lounge around the pool the summer heat can be a problem. This year a cold front had pushed through the day before and the weather was great.

On Saturday night tragedy occurred. I filled my beer cup at around midnight and the keg sputtered and died. There was no replacement. Unthinkable! That most traditionally fannish of gatherings, Midwestcon, had run out of beer! What's the world coming to?

On Sunday morning, we decided that we needed one meal of Cincinnati Chili to

complete the experience. To our horror we discovered the Skyline Chili is closed on Sunday. We had to make do with the poor stepchild, Gold Star Chili. Actually, I couldn't tell much difference. On the way back home, Corlis tried to drive but started to nod off before we had gone 30 miles. I was the only conscious thing in the car for most of the ride back home.

A Bad Break on My Birthday

The next day was July 1, my 56th birthday. Since it was a workday, I had not planned to make a big deal of it. Corlis and the boys had gotten a cake together, but there would be no time for the traditional homemade ice cream. I really wanted to go to the martial arts workout that evening because it would be my last opportunity to practice for over a week since we were leaving later that week on vacation.

The Taekwando class went well. In the summer we run through a grueling outdoor obstacle course. Over the last few weeks, I have noticed that my stamina on the trail had notched up again to the point that I could run it with John O'Dell, a definite new high point for me. After Taekwando class John and I stayed to practice Hapkido. Usually, the class is just me and John with Joe Grosso teaching. This time, however, Jimmy Minton stayed over to participate. Jimmy is a 30-ish bodybuilder and ex-club bouncer who knows a lot of really effective takedown and control techniques.

Joe introduced John and I to a new Judo style throw that we practiced until John had to leave. I was about to go too when Jimmy came up to see what we were practicing. He did not know that particular throw, so he asked me to show it to him. I threw him a couple of times and then he started practicing on me. The first two times he threw me but was not quite right on the footwork, so I did not go down cleanly and fall into an easily controlled position. On the third try, Jimmy planed his foot between mine instead of behind. As he pulled me down our legs tangled instead of mine flying out from under me. Jimmy came down with all his weight in my inner calf. As we hit the mat my ankle cracked like a half-dozen

pencils snapping and a blinding pain shot up my leg.

Within seconds my ankle started to swell and turn purple. I was, however, able to hobble on it enough to get to the car and drive home. I got to blow out my birthday cake candles while laying in the recliner with an icepack on my leg. It's funny because this was not the first time this had happened to me. About 30 years ago I was doing a Boy Scout service project by cleaning up the beach around the marina where we kept our houseboat. I had collected several bags full of trash and when I lifted one of them a sharp piece of glass slashed across my calf. That took 15 stitches to sew shut and there is a picture somewhere of me holding my birthday cake on my chest with my leg bandaged.

The next morning, I hauled myself into the doctor to get the leg X-rayed. Fortunately, nothing was broken, nor were any of the tendons or muscles completely torn. The doctor said I had just done a rather compete job of spraining the ankle since the muscles and tendons on both the outer and inner calf were damaged as well as the Achilles tendon. He told me that I could do anything I wanted, only limited by my ability to tolerate the pain. Corlis had already bought me an ace bandage and an air brace that made walking possible, if not pleasant. I got a cane that helped too.

This did not come at a really good time. First, I really needed to mow my yard. I hired Joseph Grosso, the teenage son of our Tawkwando master to do the mowing. Second, we were leaving on July 5 for a 10-day vacation in Washington DC. Since I was at least ambulatory, if not fast on my feet, I did not feel that we had to cancel the vacation. I would just have to live with the pain and Corlis would have to do all the driving.

I had, at least, planned out the vacation so that we would not have to do much driving once we got to the District. Our hotel was less than a mile away from the Metro line, so we planned to let DC mass transit do most of the driving. We arrived on the Mall mid-afternoon on Saturday, July 5 and proceeded to explore the Air and Space Museum and the Silk Road exposition that was set up on the

mall. This was a series of cultural exhibits erected in tents that took you from Italy to Japan. At one point the boys decided that they were starving, so I made them eat Japanese noodles from one of the stands in the expo. I must admit to some amusement in watching hunger triumph over strangeness as they made their way through the cup of noodles.

Over the next days we toured the Museum of Natural History, the National Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, Arlington Cemetery, The Washington Monument, Union Station, and The National Zoo. The high points were the gem and mineral exhibit at the Natural History Museum, all of the NASM, the pandas at the Zoo, and the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns. The latter especially impressed Nick. He took to patrolling the platform of uncrowded subway stations. We also took off one day for Baltimore and the National Aquarium and an O's game. The O's played badly and lost to the A's 3 to 1. The game, however, was enjoyable since we did not have deep loyalties on either side. Nick had matured enough to actually pay attention to a baseball game. Still, we saw a more enjoyable game in Kingsport on July 4 when out Kingsport Mets came from behind in the final at-bat to win. That game also cost about 15% what the O's game did.

Part of the specification Corlis gave me for our summer vacation was that part of it had to take place at a beach. I booked us in to Ocean City, MD for the last two days of the vacation. The road from DC to Ocean City looked daunting on the map but was actually 4-lanes all the way and well marked. We arrived at Ocean City at 2 p.m. and found out that our hotel's water main had broken, and they were not accepting check-ins until 4 p.m. By the time we ate lunch and checked back at 3:30 they had hooked up a temporary water supply using fire hoses, and let us check in.

The shifting sand and rushing waves of the beach were hell on my ankle, so I satisfied myself by stationing myself on a beach chair and finishing up the last of the Hugo Nominee novels for this year. The boys, of course, loved the beach and divided their

time between playing in the waves and digging a tunnel in the sand. After all the hectic touring of the previous week it was actually nice to relax in the sun with a book for a change.

Unfortunately, there is no good way to get from Ocean City to Kingsport, TN. Our last day on the road dawned rainy. That prevented us from making one last visit to the beach. I then drove down the length of the Delmarva Peninsula, crossing over to Virginia Beach on the Bay Bridge and then catching US 58 West for most of Virginia. That was actually a good road all the way to Danville, VA. At that point it collapses to two lanes for about 60 miles as it crosses the Blue Ridge. We actually made it to I-81 at Wytheville before dark, and back home by 11 p.m.

And Then Off To Mexico...

As if the last two months have not been busy enough, I got to stay at home for one whole day before it was time to head off to Mexico City for the annual Panamerican Paint Show. This is one of the biggest events of the year for me, so it not only makes for a busy week, I have a significant amount of preparation to get ready for it.

My ankle put me behind schedule for preparing for the show because I was in too much pain to work on July 3. Taking a week of vacation right before the show may not have been the best idea, but since the boys go back to school on August 12, it was about the only week we had available. My boss Guillermo was going to attend this year, and that would make booth duty a bit easier for me, but I was still not looking forward to two days of 10 hours on my feet.

In past years the Mexican organizers of the show, a group called ANAFyPIT, have gotten either the US paint industry association, FSCT, or the European group, SPC, to help with the planning and running of the show. This year about six weeks before the show ANAFyPIT decided to go it alone. Back in January when FSCT was still working with the Mexicans they asked Eastman to put together a short course on ink formulation. Since one part of the program being completely provided by Eastman, they

decided it was not fair to others to allow us to make a technical presentation during the paint part of the program. Even though I had a paper ready to go, they said they didn't need it. Around the first of June, ANAFyPIT took over completely and decided the scrap the ink short course. They then sent out the program for the paint section as a fait accompli. We were outraged when we saw that one of our competitors was down for three time slots in the program and we were not invited to participate. After a couple of rather forceful discussions, they decided that they could make room for my paper after all if I could deliver a copy to them that day. It was a good thing that I had written the presentation on spec as something to present to customers because I was able to e-mail it to ANAFyPIT right away.

Guillermo and I arrived in Mexico City on the night to Tuesday, July 16. The show did not start until the 18th, but we were supposed to call on customers and have a strategy meeting for the show. When we met on Wednesday morning, we discovered that the customer that Guillermo and I were supposed to meet with had blown up off the day before. We ended up killing time at the office until Carlos Gamboa set up a meeting with me at a distributor's office.

The Eastman office in Mexico City is located on the 23rd floor of a 31-story building. It is the tallest building for several miles, so it offers a commanding view of the city. On that Wednesday morning the air was exceptionally clear, and we had a crystal clear view of Popocatépetl, the volcano that looms about 150 miles to the southeast of the city. The smoke plume from the top of the mountain was clearly visible. Aside from that there were no significant seismic events while we were there.

That night we had a group dinner at the Angus Steak House, a Mexico City tradition that is famous for its fresh meat; and the steaks aren't half bad either. Our lovely young leather-clad waitress, Angelica, had a heart-stopping tendency to lean over the table when asked questions. The wine stewardess was a 19-year-old beauty who didn't know much about wine. We took advantage of this by sending her to Oscar

Lagos, our resident enologist. Oscar kept her at the table for at least 25 minutes teaching her the basics of vine opening, tasting, and serving. By the end of the meal, he had her phone number so that he could continue the lesson. Yeah, right.

The next morning was showtime for me as I was to give my much-disputed presentation during the technical program. The paper I was giving was about a new development that allows a traditionally solvent-only technology to be adapted to waterborne systems. ANAFyPIT has neglected to inform me that the technical program was a short course in paint formulation, so my talk went right over the heads of part of the audience. On the other hand, there were several times during my speech that people in the audience interrupted me with questions. I would much rather have a dialogue than simply recite my speech and have questions asked later. This showed me that at least part of the audience was paying attention. Also, five people from the audience of 50 or so came by the Eastman booth later to ask more questions.

The show was greatly reduced from years past due to many factors. First the general economic conditions in Mexico are not really healthy right now. Second, with their program-on-the-cheap, ANAFyPIT had decided not to have simultaneous translation provided for the technical program. This eliminated most of the potential presenters from the U.S. from participating. I feel that when they could not take part in the program some companies decided to save money and stay home. Third, for the first time there was an admission charge to the show. I know that Eastman paid in five figures for our booth, and four other multinationals did also. The basic charge for a 9 m² booth with no ornamentation was \$6000. ANAFyPIT decided to pocket all that money and charge 150 pesos per head for visitors to the show.

In Mexico there is a cultural tendency that workers are not given paid time to visit trade shows. Expos like this one was thought of as extras over and above the job duties. For this reason, it is difficult to get a big crowd at the show. Adding an admission charge on top of that made it even harder.

We did, in spite of all this, manage to stay busy for most of the show, and made about as many contacts as we had in past years. By Friday night at 8 p.m. when the show closed all I wanted to do was to crawl into a bed for a day. I had found that, at least for the short-term, it was better for me to stay on my feet than to sit down. When I sat my leg started to cramp. If I was careful not to strain my ankle the pain was less when I was standing.

In order to save the company some money and to do some follow-up work on the leads from the show I stayed over the weekend and returned home on Monday. This allowed me a couple of days to rest my ankle and catch up on paperwork. The hotel where I was staying was right across the street from a disco. A coincidence of architecture seemed to focus the noise directly on my room. The sound in my room was actually louder than the disco was on the street. I got both the reflected sound off the other wing of the hotel plus the direct sound from the street. The dance went on from 1-4 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, so I didn't get as much rest as I might have liked.

I did the uncharacteristic thing for me and mostly stayed in my room over the weekend. My ankle was really not in shape to do much moving, so I stayed in and opened the picture window in my room and watched the weather passing across the city while writing SFPA. You really begin to get an idea of how big Mexico City is when you watch storms cross it. The hills and tall buildings look like they are close, but when you look out and see something in the background fade away in a thunderstorm without your position or the faraway hills getting a drop you know you are in the midst of something big. It is rather like watching the storms cross the desert. They look like they are close, but they are really many miles away.

Over the afternoon the storms turn on and off like God's Own Sprinkler System. Suddenly a cloud will turn lose and a column of rain will drape down on the city for most of an hour before running dry. Then suddenly the process repeats right overhead and suddenly the neighborhood is caught in a downpour. A bolt of lightning struck the top of a nearby

building and all the car alarms for blocks were triggered by the shock. The cycle repeated itself in another part of the city until in the early evening the storms retreat to the mountains around the city as if they are climbing up there to rest up for another day of random dousing tomorrow. It is almost as hypnotic as watching the tide roll in at the beach.

On Sunday night thankfully the disco didn't fire back up and I at least got a good night's sleep before going home on Monday afternoon. The heaviest airport security I've seen was in Mexico last October. Now, most of that is gone. They have the obligatory random luggage searches, multiple metal detectors, and passport checks, but there was nothing like the searching of every bag that I endured last year. Things are settling back to normal in the skies. Pretty soon the airline industry and its puppet the FAA will declare that the new security measures have been 100% successful since there have been no more hijackings. The onerous security checks will mostly be abandoned, and the one thing that might actually improve security, passenger profiling, will never have been even tried.

THE HUGO NOMINEES

I usually try to make the effort to read the Hugo nominated novels before sending in my ballot. I managed to read all of them except for Lois McMaster Bujond's *The Curse of Chalion*. I never saw the book on a Huxter table or in a bookstore, so I just missed it. This year, I actually have the time and inclination to write about this year's crop. Here we go...

Passage by Connie Willis: I have enjoyed most of Ms. Willis' work, and I think that *Passage* is one of her most accessible and engaging books yet. The premise is that Dr. Joanna Lander is a young psychologist studying near death experiences, or NDE's in a Denver hospital. Her research is going mostly nowhere, mainly because NDE research is a nest of vipers and True Believers trying to either prove that these is life after death or simply trying to bleed some money for those who want to believe. Joanna, however, is a serious researcher and

has compiled an intriguing set of interviews with NDE patients. There is a mystifying thread of similarity that runs through many of the NDE's, but they are also obscured by the confusion and emotion of the events.

Dr. Lander is becoming more frustrated with her work until she meets with Dr. Richard Wright, a neurologist who has made some important breakthroughs. He was lucky enough to catch an NDE on an advanced brain scanner called RIPT. The machine can show where brain activity is occurring, and clearly showed that unusual things were happening in the patient's brain during the NDE. Furthermore, Dr. Wright had discovered an experimental drug that appears to stimulate an NDE in an otherwise healthy person. The two need each other. Dr. Wright can introduce a measure of control on Dr. Lander's otherwise random access to NDE's and Dr. Lander can navigate Dr. Wright through the snakepit of NDE research.

Together the work begins to succeed beyond their expectations. The NDE's that they induce seem to match perfectly with the "natural" ones that Joanna is studying. As the data piles up, however, an incredible pattern begins to emerge. Joanna has long known that one of the strangest things about NDE's is the similarity of elements shared from patient to patient. Second, many of the NDE's take place on a specific place, like a ship or an airplane. When Joanna herself undergoes one of Richard's NDE's she also experiences being on board a ship. Specifically, she realizes, The Titanic.

That discovery throws the research into a tailspin. The Titanic is just too hokey to be believed. If the team publishes their findings, the scientific community and the lunatic fringe will probably shun them at the same time. Still, the theme of the Titanic is woven through many of the NDE's Joanna has investigated right down to one dying man whose last words were *fifty-eight. Too far. She'll never make it in time.* It turns out that The Carpathia was 58 miles away from The Titanic when it struck the iceberg.

OK, so some NDE's are of people stranded on the sinking Titanic, or the carrier Yorktown, or The Hindenberg, ect. That's a nice piece of

data, but *what does it mean?* Are the people having the NDE's somehow mentally transported to the sinking Titanic, is it part of some racial memory, or is it something else? That's where the last half of the book takes you, and it is a fascinating trip.

I will vote *Passage* as my number one choice on the Hugo ballot. It is hard SF, taken right from some of the latest advances in brain studies and the real-life lore of NDE's. As always, Connie Willis' characterless are vividly drawn and their struggles and thoughts feel very real. The contemporary setting may put off some readers who prefer their SF with spaceships and aliens. Others may find that the book seems to move too slowly in the first part, but all of that detail is necessary to set up the final acts. Once you get to them, I think you will find yourself drawn on by the story like moving into the light at the end of the tunnel.

***American Gods* by Neil Gaiman:** I first ran across Neil Gaiman's work in the manic *Good Omens* written with Terry Pratchett. I have also greatly enjoyed Gaiman's other works to date. *American Gods* does have it over *Passage* in that it is a wild ride from cover to cover. The premise of the book is an old one. The gods not only exist, they spring into existence when there are people to believe in them. They come and go, as Terry Pratchett suggests in *The Last Hero*, when there is sufficient belief to sustain them. Therefore (at least on the Discworld) the improvement of roads and invention of faster conveyances brought about Aniger, the Goddess of Squashed Animals, as in "Oh god, what have I hit?"

In the case of *American Gods*, the deities in question are the Old Ones who migrated over to the New World with the first Viking explorers. Thus Mr. Wednesday, a.k.a Wotan, a.k.a. Odin, a.k.a The Thunderer made a foothold in America. He gets along mainly because his name has been incorporated into the days of the week. Since people certainly believe in *Wednesday* they've got to carry a little residual belief around for old Odin.

But all is not well in Asgard West. The gods of the Norse pantheon are suffering from both

diminished belief and the incursion of new, jazzier gods like Internet, Showbiz, Money, and Politics. Furthermore, the old ones are physically vulnerable. They are immortal as long as the belief holds out, but they can be physically killed.

Shadow is a man who is ready to believe in the gods because only divine interference could make a man so miserable. One day before he is to leave prison, serving a sentence for a crime he committed to protect others, Shadow is released early to tend to the death of his beloved wife. It turns out that his wife's cause of death was a car wreck caused by her giving a mobile blowjob to his best friend. On the way home the devastated Shadow is offered a job by a mysterious stranger on the plane who calls himself Mr. Wednesday.

Shadow's job is to both bolster up Wednesday's belief quotient and to act as a bodyguard and odd-job man. As Shadow is sucked further and further into the realm of the gods, both old and new, he finds that the world is not only stranger than he imagined, it is stranger than even the gods can imagine.

What follows is a roller-coaster ride across the American Heartland as the new gods try to entice Shadow into betraying his beliefs. The funny thing about belief is, however, once you believe something it is nearly impossible to not believe it. The fate of the world is not really at stake, it is more the struggle of tradition versus progress. It's not what you believe it's how well you believe it.

This is my choice for second place. It is not SF in the strictest sense, although it is a novel that takes on questions of what is real and what is worth believing in. After all, SF is, at the core, about suspension of disbelief. The only thing negative I have to say about *American Gods* was that I had pretty much figured out where it was headed by about halfway through. Even knowing that, the ride was lots of fun.

***The Chronoliths* by Robert Charles Wilson:** This year's Hugo Nominees were certainly a diverse lot. A medical thriller, Norse gods roaming around in Indiana, and now, *The Chronoliths* one of the most

distinctive time travel stories I've ever read. Unlike most time travel novels, nobody travels back in time here. The only thing that happens is that someone from the future sends large monuments about 20 years back in time to commemorate a military victory that will happen in the future.

Scott Warden is an American software developer stranded in Thailand with his wife and young daughter. He was working on a development contract that expired. Scott decided to stay on in Thailand thinking that something would come up. That something turned out to be the appearance of the first Chronolith in the Thai jungle. He has the dubious honor of being one of the first people to see the icy monument and the destruction it wreaks due to its arrival. Unfortunately, Scott's detour into the jungle happens when, unknown to him, his daughter becomes critically ill. His wife, tired of her slacker husband and Asia, calls home to daddy and leaves Scott behind.

The Chronolith seems to be made of dark matter because it resists all attempts to analyze it with anything less than an A-bomb. It would probably resist that too, but the Thai government would object. The only thing that can be determined about the Chronolith is that it was apparently sent from 23 years in the future, commemorates a military victory by some named Kuin, and its arrival comes with a burst of radiation and a cold so intense the air freezes around the newly arrived monument. The first Chronolith appeared in the jungle. The second one appeared in downtown Bangkok and obliterated the city.

Years pass and Scott scrapes writing software and helping to support his crippled daughter even when his wife remarries. In college he had one class with a brilliant physicist, Dr. Sue Chopra, now the preeminent researcher in temporal manipulation. Sue reappears and sucks Scott into her orbit of scientists studying the Chronoliths. Scott begins to learn that no matter how much he doesn't like it, there is no such thing as coincidence when time travel is concerned, and that he is inextricably linked to the mystery of the Chronoliths.

The problem of the Chronoliths is driving the government nuts. Each monument that Kuin sends back to mark yet another victory as he marches across Asia, then the Middle East, then Europe makes them more nervous. Obviously, someone has discovered how to send objects through time. The most likely person to do that is Sue Chopra. If Sue develops time travel, then evidently Kuin will steal the technology and take over the future. If, however, Sue does not develop the technology then the US is left to face the oncoming Kuin without a defense. There's no good solution, so Dr. Chopra's research predictably blows hot and cold as the administrations change over the years.

The effect of the Chronoliths on the civilian population is also profound. Some see Kuin as the inevitable conqueror of the Earth. To them it is better to surrender and submit in advance than be crushed in the war when Kuin comes calling. Others see Kuin as a threat that must be faced with all guns blazing. Dr. Chopra sees him as a temporal anomaly that may disappear in a puff of logic if only she could perfect the technology. The three sides don't have much in common.

This was a book that kept me guessing right up to the end. Mr. Wilson does a great job of keeping all options open until he is ready to play his hand at the climax. The characters are all believable. Nobody does anything superhuman, except perhaps for the spooky intellect of Sue Chopra. I was impressed by both the originality of the premise and the skill of the storytelling. I had not paid attention to the work of Robert Charles Wilson before now, but I will in the future. It was a tough choice, but I put *The Chronoliths* in third place only because *American Gods* was more fun to read.

***Perdido Street Station* by Chris Miéville:**

I am getting a bit tired of writing, and this Amazon.com review is right along the lines of what I would have written anyhow, so here goes:

Amazon.com's Best of 2001
When Mae West said, "Too much of a good thing can be wonderful," she could have been

talking about China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*. The novel's publication met with a burst of extravagant praise from Big Name Authors and was almost instantly a multiaward finalist. You expect hyperbole in blurbs; and sometimes unworthy books win awards, so nominations don't necessarily mean much. But *Perdido Street Station* deserves the acclaim. It's ambitious and brilliant and—rarity of rarities—sui generis. Its clearest influences are Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy and M. John Harrison's Viriconium books, but it isn't much like them. It's Dickensian in scope, but fast-paced and modern. It's a love song for cities, and it packs a world into its strange, sprawling, steam-punky city of New Crobuzon. It can be read with equal validity as fantasy, science fiction, horror, or slipstream. It's got love, loss, crime, sex, riots, mad scientists, drugs, art, corruption, demons, dreams, obsession, magic, aliens, subversion, torture, dirigibles, romantic outlaws, artificial intelligence, and dangerous cults.

Generous, gaudy, grand, grotesque, gigantic, grim, grimy, and glorious, *Perdido Street Station* is a bloody fascinating book. It's also so massive that you may begin to feel you're getting too much of a good thing; just slow down and enjoy.

Yes, but what is *Perdido Street Station* about? To oversimplify: the eccentric scientist Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin is hired to restore the power of flight to a cruelly de-winged birdman. Isaac's secret lover is Lin, an artist of the khepri, a humano-insectoid race; theirs is a forbidden relationship. Lin is hired (rather against her will) by a mysterious crime boss to capture his horrifying likeness in the unique khepri art form. Isaac's quest for flying things to study leads to verification of his controversial unified theory of the strange sciences of his world. It also brings him an odd, unknown grub stolen from a secret government experiment so perilous it is sold to a ruthless drug lord—the same crime boss who hired Lin. The grub emerges from its cocoon, becomes an extraordinarily dangerous monster, and escapes Isaac's lab to ravage New Crobuzon, even as his discovery becomes known to a hidden, powerful, and sinister intelligence. Lin

disappears and Isaac finds himself pursued by the monster, the drug lord, the government and armies of New Crobuzon, and other, more bizarre factions, not all confined to his world. –*Cynthia Ward*

OK, well said, Cynthia. Still, after all that, why do I put *Perdido Street Station* in fourth place on my Hugo ballot? The book is, as described above, fast moving and very entertaining. There were some quirks, however, in China Miéville's writing style that I could not get past. The book is in a genre by itself somewhere between SF and fantasy. It actually leans more toward SF with a touch of Lovecraft. The fantasy elements, however, are thrown in with magic and science rubbing elbows all the way. I usually like this kind of *Unknownesque* style, but here it got on my nerves.

The book has both human and alien races thrown together without a hint of how the mélange came about. There is no mention of space travel, alien abduction, or biowar gone wrong to explain the situation. If Miéville had simply left out the humans I would have liked the book much better. Second, the story does, in the end, boil down to a monster hunt. Third, I got a bit bored with the continual reminders of the degradation of New Crobuzon. It is basically the Discworld's Ankh-Morpork meant to be taken seriously. I will probably buy and read the sequel, and I enjoyed reading *Perdido Street Station* a few chapters a day while vacationing. I just won't vote it at the top of the Hugo ballot.

***Cosmonaut Keep* by Ken McLeod:** Here we have clearly the most skiffy of this year's nominees and yet here it is at the bottom of my ballot.

Cosmonaut Keep is a dual timeline novel about two distant ancestors that both get caught up in the development of star flight. In the next century the European Union is absorbed by a resurgent Russia, and Matt Cairns is a freelance software development manager who stumbles across the plans for an alien stardrive. Matt must escape from England to Area 51 in order to connect up with the American UFO watchers in order to

get himself to the Russian space station where they can build the starship.

Several thousand years later, Gregor Cairns is a marine biologist on an Earth colony world studying ways to adapt squid brains into a supercomputer powerful enough to do the massive number crunching needed to navigate a starship.

It turns out that the starship was a bit of a pig-in-a-poke from the aliens. The real Masters of the Universe are the squid-like Krakens who swim the galaxy in search of the answer to Life, The Universe, and Everything. They view most other planet-bound life forms as noisy spam to be eradicated every few millennia with a well-aimed asteroid. Being basically indifferent towards most lifeforms they allow them to hitch a ride on their giant spaceships. The plans they gave Matt make a functioning starship. The catch is that it has only one preset course laid in. When the explorers on one end of the timeline make their first test drive, they find themselves transported on a one-way trip to a livable planet populated by the remains of the other races that evolved on Earth but the Krakens decided were getting too noisy. In order to become masters of their own fate the humans must learn how to navigate the starship by themselves.

I found *Cosmonaut Keep* to be readable enough to keep me occupied while watching the tide come in at Ocean City Beach. The split timeline was a rather irritating plot device that has been used enough that its newness has worn off. There are a couple of holes in the logic of the plot that were unsatisfying such as the fact that some of the characters had achieved immortality, but how is never explained. All-in-all it was a rather run of the mill book. I will probably buy the second part of the trilogy since *Cosmonaut Keep* was good enough to keep me occupied through something like a long flight, but I will not rush out and buy the hardcover.

Well, that's the lot. I'll be interested in your opinions, but it's a bit late if you have to read them all before voting time!

MAILING COMMENTS

THE SOUTHERNER NO. 226: JEFFREY COPELAND—Thanks for the clarifications on the mailing mechanics. I always try to remember to check the No Signature box since I try to think what it would be like at my house if we were receiving mailings. This is in NO WAY a hint that I would like to run for OE! I would be a terrible one with my travel schedule and convention responsibilities, so don't even think about it.

THE NEW PORT NEWS NO. 202: NED BROOKS—The drawing on the cover just shows that not much has changed in the business world over the last century. I don't think that it has really sunk into Dubya yet about just how angry many people are about how his corporate buddies have lined their pockets and then hidden the loot away in funky accounting. I suppose that in his calculation, nobody that can really hurt him is upset.

We missed you at DSC. I hope there was no other reason than avoiding the drive that kept you away. You missed a good one!

Did you find your solvents at Home Depot? I think that 95% methanol and 5% ethylene glycol would make an acceptable duplicating fluid. The idea of the mixture is to have the majority of it be something that evaporates very quickly but have a small amount of a tail that plasticizes the ink while it sets up. Ethylene glycol is a good choice because it is slow and is structurally like two-headed methanol. Just about anything that will dissolve in methanol will dissolve in EG.

I found a new use for my Dremel tool after our recent gem-mining trip to North Carolina. The gemstones themselves are fairly cheap. The real money comes in getting them cut. I couldn't resist trying to polish up some of the stones with the Dremel. I made some progress using one of the garnets that wouldn't be too much of a loss if I destroyed it. The tool did a great job of taking off the sedimentary coating off the crystals but was not effective in cutting facets. I guess that is not too surprising since garnet is the abrasive used in most sandpaper.

I'm glad you made it to 64 before losing a cousin. I just found out that I lost one last week. My cousin Terry Graves was a world-class classical guitarist. I am glad to have autographed collies of some of his recordings. He was one-third of an acclaimed guitar group called the De Falla Trio. Last week he was vacationing in London, had just gotten off the train from the airport, and collapsed on sidewalk of a heart attack. He was no more than four years older than me. I didn't see him often since moving away from Northern Indiana in the late 60's. He had moved to California to teach at UCLA. I did get to see him a few years ago when he played a concert at UK. He was a good friend from my childhood and a splendid artist, and I HATE it that he is gone.

TWIGDRASIL AND TREEHOUSE GAZETTE # 74: RICHARD DENGROVE—I'm glad you made it to DSC! What is the world coming to? Ned Brooks misses, and you make two-in-a-row!

The reason for Dr. Fahrenheit to chose salt water over pure water was quite simple and actually clever. In those days it was nearly impossible to obtain pure water. It only takes a little contamination to change the freezing point of water. In that time then water was nearly useless as a standard. What Fahrenheit did was to turn the problem around and use lab synthesized dirty water. As a standard saturated salt water is much better because it is *reproducible*. This allowed scientists the world over a way to use a temperature scale with a verifiable standard point of reference.

G. F. Handel did not write *Joy to the World*. The lyrics were written in 1719 by a Handel contemporary, Isaac Watts and was later set music written by American composer Lowell Mason in the early 1800's. I also thought it was from Handel, but a quick Google search does not place it in Handel's body of work and website on hymns gives the credit to Watts and Mason.

Actually, Hewlett-Packard allows banner-fed paper on some models of inkjet printers and The Print Shop will support printing to a banner. I have

seen the paper at Office Depot within the last year, so I know it is out there. I recently bought a HP DeskJet 940 that I think supports banner printing, but I have not yet had time to see if it works. I still have a carton of banner-fed paper for an old dot matrix. I suppose that if I tore off the track feed it would theoretically feed continuously into the printer as long as the software supports it.

Actually, it makes sense not to support drum quantities of commodity solvents. The only way Eastman sells to direct customers is in bulk. The rest goes through distributors. We sell to distributors, and they take the bulk stuff and break it up into drums. Drumming is actually a very expensive process and inventory control is a nightmare. By farming the drumming out to distributors, it gives them a way to add value to their customers and allows them to do business on a more appropriate scale. It also gives the distributors a way to compete with each other. If they can work out the details of drumming more efficiently than a competitor, it gives them an edge. Since selling to small customers is inherently more difficult to manage than selling to a few big ones, by letting the distributors pocket the upcharge for offering drums it gives them incentive to find business. If Eastman did the drumming, then distributors would be less motivated to sell.

Your other observations on the bone headedness of the Eastman management, however, are right on target. I think that one of Eastman's problems is that all for the top managers are engineers that switched to management in mid-career. I'm not sure that a boardroom full of Harvard MBA's would be any better, but I don't think that leaders who switched from chemistry to business as a midlife crisis are a great thing either.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME #11: RICH LYNCH—

Your mention of Vivaldi's *Spring* concerto made me think of another piece of seasonal music that I've grown to like. My opinion of most 20th century music is that you would have a better result by throwing two cats in a feed sack. There are a few exceptions. One of these is Aaron Copeland's *Appalachian Spring*. I recently bought a double CD of Copeland's Greatest Hits mostly because I had heard the *Simple Gifts* variations on the radio and couldn't get the tune out of my head.

There is something vitally *American* about Copeland's work that I find appealing. I think the

range of textures and brash exuberance of much of his work makes it very appealing. *Appalachian Spring*, *The Mexican Suite*, and *Rodeo* are my favorites. I also like to listen to Copeland and then to John Williams to hear the influence. Copeland was one of the first "serious" composers to write for the screen and he left a profound influence on those who have followed.

I also recently bought an amazing CD that I heard a bit of during our local station's fund drive. It is *Perpetual Motion* by Belá Fleck. The disc is a set of diverse classical favorites arranged for banjo and other instruments. Fleck's virtuoso banjo playing is amazing in its own right, but what he has done to expand the instrument's range in these pieces is a masterpiece. I had never thought of it before, but the way the banjo produces sound is very similar to a harpsichord. Indeed, the many of the sounds on *Perpetual Motion* are reminiscent of the harpsichord. The divergence is that the banjo has a much broader *emotional* range than the harpsichord. The adaptations of the baroque pieces therefore sound something like the original, but the level of feeling in the performances is on a whole other level. And then there is the title piece, Paganini's violin virtuoso piece, *Moto Perpetuo*. There are so many notes in there that Fleck says in the liner notes that his hands needed physical therapy after playing it. To give a hint of the playfulness of the disc, there are two versions of *Moto Perpetuo* on it. One is a straightforward classical arrangement for banjo and piano, and another Bluegrass version scored for banjo and fiddle. I think that Paganini would have wholeheartedly approved because both versions are jaw-droppingly unbelievable. I'm just glad that the first time I heard it I was sitting in the car waiting for Nick to leave a Scout meeting. If I had been driving, I don't know if I could have maintained control of the car. Check out the samples at Amazon.com to see if you agree with me.

SPIRITUS MUNDI #188: GUY H. LILLIAN III—As always, it was great to see you and Rosie at DSC, and the Rubble Award ****er**** ceremony was fun. Thanks for Rosie for being a good sport. I think that it is appropriate that you and Rosie are the first Rubble Couple.

You are right, by niece Stephanie is going to be, well, interesting. I'm just glad I can watch from a distance and not have to do the actual parenting.

Not only does she have the looks and the red hair, but she is also a math prodigy and budding pianist. We were amazed at Easter when we visited, and she shyly performed some of her own piano compositions for us. At 13 she just discovered that she had melodies in her head that wanted writing down. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

Our family just loves pulling jokes on one another. I am teaching this to Corlis' family too. Eating at her grandmother's house is all you would expect of a grandmotherly meal. She puts enough food on the table to feed a small developing nation and then is frustrated when it is all not eaten. Some time ago, we decided to short circuit her endless forcing of helpings on us by designating a dish to be in constant motion. For one whole meal one of us would ask the others to pass the stewed apples. None of us would take any, we just asked the others to pass the bowl. This kept us amused and Grandma Sydna confused for several courses. I'm not sure that she ever completely caught on what we were doing, but as long as we were asking for something to be passed, she thought we were actually eating.

Ack! You clod! *Young Frankenstein* is one of the ten greatest comedies of all time! (Now, what are the other nine?) Looking over the winners for the mid-seventies, what piece of *real* SF (in your opinion, Guy) deserved the award more? Look at the winners around it: *Sleeper* in 1974 and *A Boy and His Dog* in 1976. If Mel Brooks is not deserving, why is Woody Allen? You would be hard pressed to even find a copy of *A Boy and His Dog* today.

PETER, PAN, AND MERRY #42: DAVID SCHLOSSER—I think that Worldcon committees mostly keep their fingers crossed that they don't have to make an eligibility ruling on Hugo nominees. My own feeling is that enough of the people nominating a work felt strongly enough to place it on the ballot then it probably deserves to be there. Look at this year's Best Novel Nominees: one pure fantasy, a present-day medical mystery, a modern myth, a genre defying monster hunt, a time travel story, and an aliens-and-spaceship novel. Of all of these, the most SF-y of the lot, *Cosmonaut's Keep*, is in my opinion the least likely to win. China Miéville and Lois McMaster Bujold both have strong fan followings, and it is conceivable that the least SF-y of the nominees could win. So far as I can tell, SF goes on and the

occasional boundary-pushing award gives us all something to argue about in APA-zine pages.

TRIVIAL PURSUITS #100: JANICE GELB—Hey, like wow! Your 100th mailing and you get a month in Australia. What'll you do for the 200th top that?

Yes, you are right, the BCS is kind of like an appendix. When it works it doesn't do anything and when it does something it could bring the whole system down. Hopefully it will stay that way-something to watch and talk about but in the end does not really affect the game.

I am soooo glad that I didn't break my ankle. I've lived with the sprain for a month and will probably be able to go back to training in two or three more weeks. I would really hate to be incapacitated for an extended period, especially since we pay for Tawkwando lessons a year in advance. The really frustrating thing was that I was almost ready to test for my black stripes. With the injury I can see that it will be several months before I will be back to that level again.

PLAYING PEPE LA PEW #56 BY JEFFREY COPELAND—A few observations on regional encoding on DVD's. On my recent trip to Mexico while passing an ideal weekend I browsed through a Wal-Mart and a mall. One of the things I looked at was the DVD selection. I was surprised to see that DVD players were price comparable with those in the US. Wal-Mart had a special for around \$90. I could not determine from the box whether the player was Region 1 or Region 4, and the employee I asked didn't know either! On the DVDs they had for sale, some were encoded for both regions and others were strictly Region 4. The prices were pretty comparable to a few dollars more than those in the US. From what I could see the selection was very thin.

It appears to me that the entertainment industry in its eagerness to extract every possible dollar from the public is, as you suggested, shooting itself in the foot with regional encoding. In Mexico they could just bring in Region 1 DVDs in and sell them cheaper since they are mass produced. Since the Region 4 market is so much smaller the unit price is higher, so they lose a lot of the market in a very price sensitive area like Mexico.