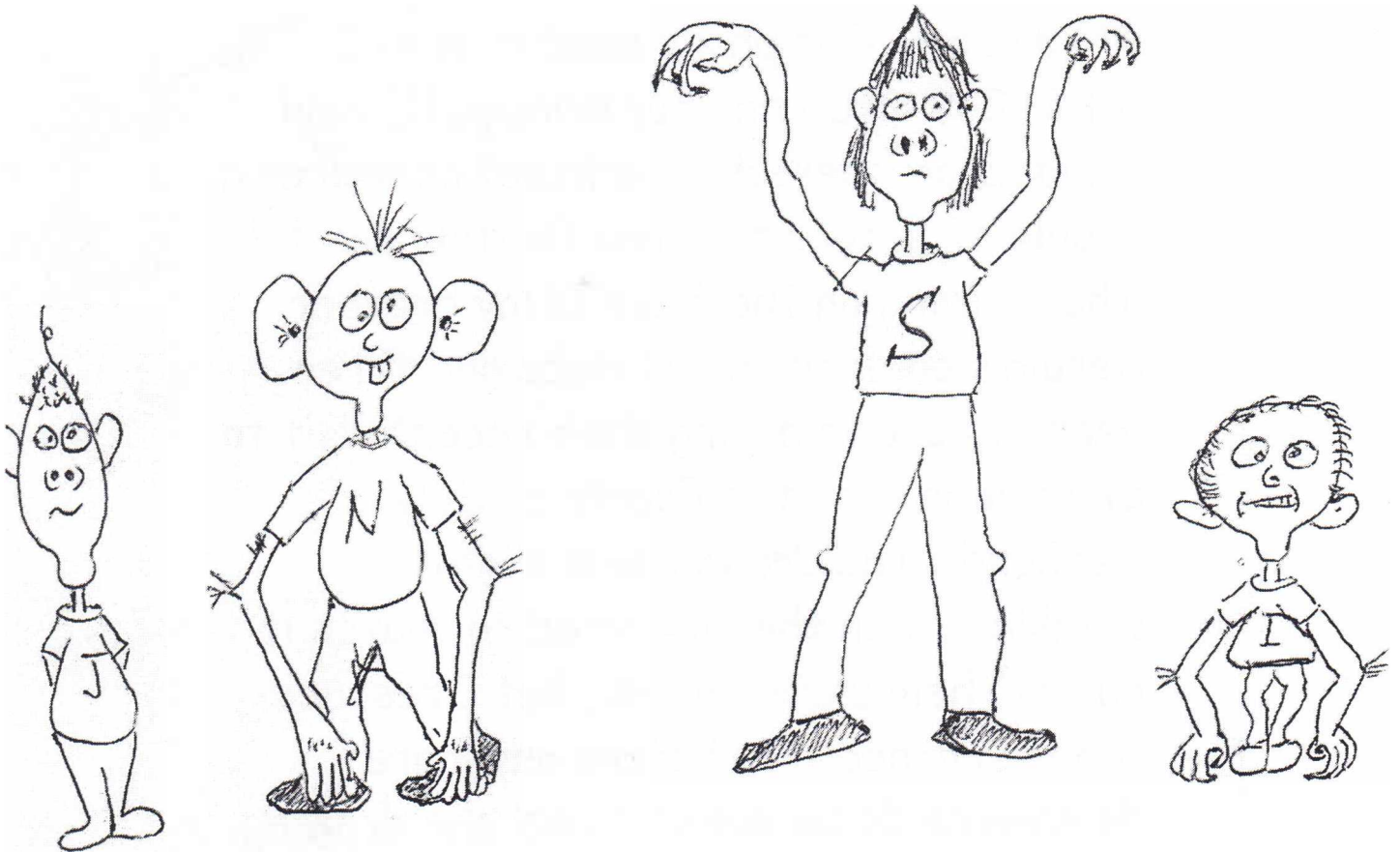


TENNESSEE TRASH #54

How Many Robes Does It Take To Fill A House?



Tennessee Trash #54 was produced by Gary R. Robe for SFPA Mailing Number 234, June-July 2003. Our P.O. Box just moved to the palatial new Post Office building recently completed here but the number is still P. O. Box 3221, Kingsport TN 37664. Our phone number is still (423) 239-3106 and our principal E-mail remains grrobe@chartertn.net as well as a couple of others that are floating around. The drawing on the front is my brother Gerald's portrait of his niece and three nephews drawn during their recent visit to Chez Robe over the Fourth of July weekend. The drawing was slightly wrinkled when the kids tried to snatch it out of their uncle's hands, but I rescued it and scanned it in before any more damage could be done. I feel the drawing captures their true essence, don't you?

TENNESSEE TRASH #54

A ZINE BY GARY R. ROBE FOR MAILING NUMBER 234 OF
THE SOUTHERN FANDOM PRESS ALLIANCE

JUNE-JULY 2003

AN UNLIKELY WEDDING, BASEBALL PLAYERS IN THE CELLAR, A FULL HOUSE AND OTHER SUMMERTIME CURIOSITIES...

Last year at DSC Ricker Sheppard confided in me that he and Betsy Hirst were planning to get married and asked me to be his best man. I agreed instantly and happily. At the time, however, no date for the wedding was set. There were some complications from settling Rickey's mother's estate and some planning had to be done around integrating the two households with respect to Jackie, Betsy's teenage daughter from her first marriage. I said at the time that all I needed was some advance notice and to please avoid the times I knew I had to travel.

At New Years the wedding plans had not advanced much past the talking phase although they were considering dates in June and August. By February they had settled on June 14, which was fine with me, but by Concave that had fallen through due to conflicts with Betsy's family. In April they floated September 6 as a target date but I pointed out that I had already told them I would be in Brazil then. Nothing more was heard until we got an E-mail in late May that June 14 was once again The Day. That left only three weeks to prepare, but since they were not using coordinated formal wear for the wedding party or elaborate decorations it was possible.

We decided to travel to Bowling Green on Thursday the 12th since a reversal was planned for the afternoon of the 13th. One of the biggest challenges the Rickey and Betsy faced was

finding a church for the ceremony on three weeks notice for a June wedding. They found the Cecilia Memorial Presbyterian Church in Downtown Bowling Green. This tiny church, founded in 1851, is one of the city's oldest although it has remained small and nearly forgotten in what is now a somewhat rundown neighborhood. Still, since this was unlikely to be a large event, the church was fine for the purpose and actually quite charming once you found it squeezed in between the Odd Fellows Lodge and Warren County office annex.

I was looking forward to returning the favor that Rickey did me as my best man in 1988, but I was nearly put out of commission unexpectedly. I have had occasional migraine headaches for several years. They have been highly unpleasant but manageable since they only occurred separated by a month or more. When I did get one, however, the results were crippling. Aside from the pain I get severe vision impairment. My first warning that a headache is coming is the sudden development of a dazzling "aura" that starts like a little flickering point of light in the corner of my eye that rapidly expands to obscure almost half of my field of vision. When this happens I have about a half hour before the pain really hits. At that point all I can do is crawl into bed for several hours and wait out the symptoms. Even when the aura fades I am left with a large blind spot that makes most tasks, especially driving, impossible. In May I had experienced the decidedly unpleasant condition of headaches on consecutive days. In the week before the wedding I had headaches daily. (I've since had a MRI scan of my head that found nothing and the headaches have subsided.)

Corlis had to do all the driving to Bowling Green because I had an attack as we were preparing to leave and another during the drive to Kentucky. On Friday night I had the distinctly strange experience of having the migraine aura intrude on my dreams and waking up to an attack. I thought having an attack this close to the ceremony would protect me from having another until after I had performed my duties, but as we arrived at the church I got an aura flash. I do have some medicine that I can take that is sometimes effective if it take it immediately when the symptoms appear. I was able to take it that day within a minute (I don't go anywhere without it these days!) and the aura subsided although the headache pain and confusion was not completely controlled. I had nightmares of not being able to see the ring or Rickey's hand and dropping it down a heater vent.

In the last 15 years Rickey has really gotten involved with mundane clubs and is now a Mason, Shriner, Odd Fellow, and Moose. He is some sort of Grand Poobah of his Masonic lodge and has the Admiral's hat and sword to show for it. He used his Moose Lodge connections for the reversal dinner and wedding reception.

I had never been in a Moose Lodge before and my main impression was that the Moose was mostly formed as a dodge to serve alcohol in dry cities. That's mostly right but it is a bit more too. On Friday nights and Saturday mornings the lodge sets up a buffet dinner and breakfast for members and their guests that costs only about \$1 a head. There is also some entertainment available that ranges from pool tables and satellite TV to card tables and video games. Since they have a strict Members Only policy there is a bit of a speakeasy ambiance to the place. Once admitted through the outer door you are held in an "airlock" until someone in the party shows a Moose membership card. Once inside only members can buy anything directly. At least in Bowling Green the Lodge is built a bit like a bomb shelter. The walls and ceiling are so thick that cellular reception is impossible and even a police radio cannot penetrate inside.

At the reversal it became apparent why it had been so difficult to plan for the wedding. Betsy wanted to involve her family with the wedding and they were happy to participate, but on their terms. This was a mixed blessing. Betsy's sisters provided decorations for the church, filled out the bridal party, and provided moral support.

On the negative side they required a certain measure of deference to their tastes and schedules and took some of the decisions on running the ceremony away from Betsy.

One big problem was that Betsy's mother has terminal cancer and so there was some urgency in getting the wedding scheduled while she was able to attend. This meant that the rest of the family had to synchronize vacation plans so there was some degree of resentment for the intrusion. Also Betsy's mother had recent surgery and is weakened to the point of needing a walker, so her energy was limited. Since the family was already stressed by their mother's deteriorating health adapting the ceremony for her convenience and comfort was a higher priority to Betsy's sisters than anything that Betsy wanted or needed.

For Rickey and me this wasn't much of a problem because we could smile and say, "Just tell me what to do," and await instructions. Poor Betsy just had to go along with decisions on where to seat people, how to move, where to stand, when to do something and so forth. After several dry runs and mild disputes between the sisters, we got to the point where the minister could take over the ceremony and there wasn't much room for discussion. A couple of times tempers got strained but we made it through the reversal without a family meltdown. At the end Rickey gave me the items I would be responsible for: the rings and the gratuity envelopes.

We were joined for dinner at the Moose lodge by Pat Molloy and Naomi Fisher. Pat was serving as an usher and Tony Cannon was the other groomsman and thus all four of the original contingent of Bowling Green fans who attended Rivercon 4 in 1978 had a part in the wedding. I noticed that Betsy seemed very nervous around me and I realized that she was worried that I was going to take Rickey off for a night of debauchery. While the idea had more than crossed my mind, that was not in the plans. With the possibility that I could have a migraine attack at any time I just didn't dare do much with Rickey. We ended up going out for ice cream and calling it a night. This was payback for what Rickey managed for my bachelor's party. We went to see *Scrooged* as the big event of the evening.

The wedding itself went off the next day without a hitch. There was a pretty good attendance at the ceremony considering that they did not get

invitations out until three weeks prior. Besides ourselves, Pat, Naomi and Tony most of the long-time Bowling Green fans plus Tom, Anita and Debra Hussey came up from Nashville. The ceremony was simple and dignified and effective. In the end I witnessed the marriage certificate and Rickey and Betsy were legally married.

At the reception there was one overriding concern. Where had Rickey hidden his car? He had parked it somewhere remote and Tony had driven Rickey to the church under threat of death not to reveal its location. Of course Rickey's death threat is a mild thing compared to Naomi's Respectful Inquiry. It didn't take long to Naomi to pry the information out of Tony that Rickey had parked his car at the Masonic Lodge. Later Tony could defend himself by pointing out that that was a pretty obvious place to hide the car. The Fairfield Inn where Rickey works was the only other really logical place for him to park.

Now, I'm not confessing to anything, only reporting what happened, but *someone(s)* snuck out of the reception and decorated Rickey's car with multi-colored chalk markers, balloons, and tissue paper. The fact that the car was decorated with slogans like "Free Tibet!," "Free Mars," "FIAWOL," and "HOY RECIÉN CASADOS MAÑANA MUY CANSADOS" (Just Married Today Very Tired Tomorrow – it works better in Spanish) cannot be taken as any compelling evidence that a particular person or group did the deed. We found out from Tony later that when they saw the state of their car Betsy was tickled and Rickey was upset. He was certain that they were going to be given a ticket for driving an unsafe vehicle.

After dinner with Pat, Naomi, Tony and Annette Carrico we headed back home the next morning. I had not had a new migraine attack since the wedding so I was able to do the driving on the way back home. So, one of the Seven Signs of the Apocalypse has happened – Rickey Sheppard is married. As long as The Dome of the Rock stands in Jerusalem and Ken Moore doesn't finish remodeling his kitchen I figure we are safe.

BASEBALL PLAYERS IN THE BASEMENT

Each year we volunteer to host some of the Kingsport Mets players in our home. We have done this twice in the past but not for the last two years. Much of the team has been Latino

players who prefer to share one apartment than have their own room somewhere. This year, however, they needed more host families so in late May we got the word that we were needed.

In order to prepare for our guests we had to get the rooms ready for occupation. That meant moving out the toys that were in the rooms that had been moved in to allow the conversion of the playroom upstairs into Nick's bedroom. This in turn meant a truly heroic cleaning effort for the whole house. Some of the stuff in the garage had been sitting there in boxes since we moved into the house 12 years ago. I figured that anything we hadn't looked at in 12 years was fair game for the dump. In all we loaded our van to capacity three times with treasure junk to haul to the city dump. Corlis is now a more completely rounded person since she now knows the location of the Kingsport dump. Besides getting the two downstairs bedrooms ready for occupants the garage is now cleaned enough that we could actually **#gasp#** park a car in it!

On June 17 our players arrived in town. Andy Sides is a 6' 7" 18 year-old right handed pitcher from St Louis, MO and Jim Wallace is a 22 year-old catcher from Reno, NV. So far Andy has excelled in four out of five starts. Prior to the meltdown in his fifth game his ERA was 2.42 but then he got shelled for four earned runs in one inning and got pulled after 2 2/3. The policy of the K-Mets is to only allow starting pitchers to go a maximum of five games so Andy doesn't have a win on his record yet. Jim rotates the catcher's position with two others and has also served as DH a few times. He drove in the winning run on the 4th of July and crushed a really deep homer a few nights ago that may have landed in the river.

It is pretty fun having the players living with us. I don't see much of them because I'm off to work in the morning before they get up and they have left for the ballpark before I get home in the afternoon. They do lead a busy life even if they are getting paid to play a game. Every other morning they have to report to a gym for weight training at 9 a.m. Then they have to be at the park for batting practice every day by 2 p.m. They play every night it doesn't rain with only three off days in a season that lasts from mid-June to the end of August.

One of the perks of being a host family is that we get free admission to all home games, so we have

been seeing a lot of baseball this summer. That will drop off soon when the boys go back to school on August 11 but for now we are at almost all the home games. There is a special thrill of being at a minor league game that can't be duplicated by the majors. Here we can yell at the ump and be fairly certain that he can hear our well-reasoned advice and commentary on the state of his eyesight. We also know most of the K-Mets players by their jersey numbers and can hear us when we cheer them on.

Another fun aspect of minor league baseball is that not only do you see rising stars on their way up, you see old ones on their way down. This year the manager of the K-Mets is Mookie Wilson. Mookie was the Mets player that drove the ground ball through Bill Buckner's legs in the 1986 World Series that won the game and perpetuated The Curse of the Bambino on the Red Sox. Mookie has an interesting connection with the K-Mets since his stepson, Preston Wilson started his pro ball career with the K-Mets in 1997. Preston is now playing for Colorado and was on the MLB All-Star team this year. Mookie has been a lot of fun to get to know this year. He is always happy to talk to the crowd after the game and is almost like a 10th player on the field during the game. Now if only the K-Mets could win a few games everyone would be happy!

MIDWESTCON

I grumbled a bit when I learned that Midwestcon had moved again to a new hotel on the north side of Cincinnati. That added almost an hour to our drive so I grumped that the new hotel had better be worth it. Happily as it turned out, it was! The Blue Ash Doubletree hotel is a relatively new property and was really great for our needs. All the rooms are two-room suites so we could put the boys into one room and actually have a door between us and them! The hotel also had a nice poolside courtyard with a big canvas awning over almost a quarter of it so we could enjoy sitting outside without sitting in the sun.

One reason we enjoy Midwestcon is because the Chalker family also attends so there is another kid exactly Nick's age for the boys to play with and another family that doesn't mind eating with a pack of pre-teen boys. We had one dinner with the combined families and then the next night let the three boys have a pizza party in the Chalker's room while the adults went out for Indian food.

One of the highlights of the convention was a homemade Van de Graff generator that one guy brought to the convention to demonstrate. Naomi's long black hair spiking out was quite a sight. I'm not sure that Midwestcon was ready for a science programming track, but it was fun to play with the generator. The machine was constructed from household items. I learned that a garden gazing ball makes a perfectly adequate tabletop sized Van de Graff generator dome. See! SF cons are educational.

Friday night I volunteered to close down the consuite and so proceeded to stay up all night chatting with Karol Brown, Dan Caldwell, Khen Moore and others. I honestly was not keeping track of the time until we noticed that the sky was getting light at 6 a.m. I even managed to get a decent six hours of sleep, albeit from 6 a.m. to noon thanks to Corlis taking the boys to the pool when they woke up at 9:30.

Saturday night was taken up with bid parties. The race that appears to be shaping into a real close one is 2007 with Japan running against Columbus. Initially I thought that Japan would win this race without looking back but now I sense that the tide has turned. There is still a year to go before the vote but I feel that the Japanese have fallen behind. This is not from any brilliant campaigning from the Columbus bid but rather apathy and inaction from Japan. It has been almost impossible to get information on the Japanese bid and that which has appeared has not been very encouraging to the average American voter. The Japanese strategy seems to be "take it or leave it" whereas Columbus has taken their message to the streets with an aggressive campaign. I would like to be able to vote for Japan, but so far other than novelty they have not given me reason to do so.

NO ROOM IN THE INN

My parents decided to visit us in Kingsport over the July 4th weekend. We were delighted to have them come. Once they decided to make the trip my niece and nephew Jane and Stephanie wanted to come too. Once we had a mini-family reunion underway my brother Gerald decided to join in the fun. That plus the two baseball players meant that we would have 11 people staying under our roof for 3 nights! That took some thinking about the sleeping arrangements.

Mom and dad took the fold-out bed in the living room, Gerald took the inflating camp bed in the computer room in the basement. We put Nick and Isaac together on the bunk bed in Isaac's room and Jake went on a camping cot in the boy's room. Stephanie went into Nick's room and voila! accommodations for eleven!

the first morning of their visit we decided to haul the troops to Gatlinburg and the Ripley's Aquarium. The group was big enough that we took two vehicles. Gerald and I got Nick, Isaac and Jake in the van while Corlis got mom and dad and Stephanie in the Saturn. Dozing off due to highway hypnosis was not a problem for me. The kids certainly enjoyed the aquarium and browsing through the shops in Gatlinburg.

The second day we spent at Bay's Mountain Park in Kingsport. The park has just expanded to include a reptile house and a bird collection that I had never seen before. They had just gotten two new wolf cubs and so the wolves were more active than I had ever seen them even though the cubs had not yet been introduced to the pack I believe they could sense that they were nearby.

That evening we went to a K-Mets game and introduced our family to the team. They played well except for a one-inning meltdown where five runs scored. We left at the top of the eighth inning with the score six to one. What a surprise the next morning when the paper reported that the K-Mets had come on in the eighth and ninth innings to win the game seven to six! One of "our" players, Jim Wallace, even drove in the winning run. I wish we could have stayed to see it but the kids were wearing out fast.

When we lived in a tiny three-bedroom house in Franklin, KY we seemed to be Grand Central Station for fans and family passing through on I-65. Since we moved to Kingsport we have a much larger house and even better access to the Interstate, but we almost never have visitors. It was fun to have a full house for a change!

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

We had reserved our copy of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (henceforth HP5) in advance at Barnes and Noble. We stayed to the end of the K-Mets game on June 20 and then drove to B&N

in Johnson City to collect our copy. I was gratified that even in relatively illiterate Northeast Tennessee the bookstore was filled to capacity with costumed people waiting for *The Wizarding Hour*. Since we had arrived with less than an hour to spare we didn't have to wait long but there were about 200 people ahead of us. I had our copy by 12:15 and read the first chapter aloud as Corlis drove back to Kingsport.

I was going to only read it a chapter at a time to the boys at bedtime, but my willpower was not that strong. I read about half of it over the weekend before Corlis hijacked it and read it through before me. Nick had to leave for scout camp on the next Saturday so he was only able to listen to the first 7 chapters. After camp he caught by reading on the way to Midwestcon and then finished it on his own.

I rate HP5 at just below HP3 and a great improvement over HP4. What I liked about this book was the development of the characters. Harry is now a 15-year old and he acts like one. He is angry, sullen and confused and his confusion extends beyond the big picture conflict with Voldemort and the Forces of Evil (that'd be a good name for a rock band!). In this book Harry has to come to terms with his coming maturity, i.e. he discovers girls. What he does not discover is what to do with them. It is interesting and quite realistic that Harry and Ron have a developing interest in the opposite sex but bookish Hermione is the one who has figured out what is going on. In one particularly good scene Hermione explains to Harry just why the girl he is attracted to might be feeling conflicted and emotionally out of control (her ex-boyfriend was killed in HP4 when Lord V tried to kill Harry) because she is attracted to Harry.

Harry also spends most of this book being angry at the world. He may have good reason to be angry but the way he deals with his anger is, well, adolescent. There is also the possibility that some of Lord V's anger is slipping through the tenuous mental link that they share so it may not all be teenage angst.

Another reason for Harry to be confused is that he discovers that his father had his own dark side that intrudes on the perfect image he carries of his dead parents. He also has to come to grips with the fact that the dreaded Professor Snape has a real reason for disliking the Potter family

and that there is a history behind Snape's grimness. Snape and Harry both get a lesson that in matters of vital importance personalities should be left at the door.

I absolutely loved the politics of HP5. How many children's books incorporate the politics of The Big Lie into their plotlines? This is a huge part of HP5 as the wizard government declares that Lord V has not returned contrary to what anyone says and anyone who contradicts them with mere facts is either deranged or trying to make a power grab. It is especially creepy how The Big Lie works its way out at the school as the government puts a Political Officer on the staff.

Dolores Umbridge is a truly scary character in that not only does she torture the students (with Harry as her favorite target) but she represents a philosophy of anti-education that chillingly reminds me of some of the politically correct teaching theories we see in our schools. The government feels threatened if the students learn effective defensive magic so they send in their henchlady Umbridge to the school as the new defense teacher. Their strategy is simple: teach defensive magic by think learning. Read books and write essays, but don't do any actual hands-on practical spell casting. See how close that is to some of what goes on in our schools? If a subject like Biology is sensitive and actually teaching the subject might create a new generation of critical thinkers then just cut out the content. As long as there is a class called Biology and grades get sent home then the parents are happy. As long as the students have to read books, listen to lectures, write homework and take tests then they think they are learning. Thus a whole generation of educated know-nothings is born and eventually progress dies. While the idea that students would organize their own effective classes behind the teachers' backs may be stretching reality a bit, the book is still shows its audience that real learning is important enough to fight for and that having a ready defense in case of emergency is vital.

My favorite characters in the book have to be Fred and George Weasley. For one thing they are among the first to realize just what is being foisted on them and second they take matters into their own hands to strike a blow for freedom. They also show just how dangerous someone with nothing to lose can be against oppression. Fred and George have been little but comic relief

in the earlier books but in this book they become major players in the fight against evil. Along the way, however, they manage to have fun doing it.

I do have some minor quibbles about the book though. The structure of these books is about as diverse as episodes of *Scooby Doo Where Are You?* There is some action at the start that gets the story moving, then Harry & Co. move to Hogwarts where they run down clues to the mystery between classes, then during final exam week all hell breaks loose and Our Heroes have to team up to fight off the Big Bad before term ends. OK, these are children's books and I suppose that the genre demands a certain formula to make it accessible to its target audience. Still the devices used in HP5 to move the story into the final gunfight scene seemed a bit jerky and contrived compared to the earlier books. I say this as I plowed through all 870 pages of HP5 in three days and now face an impatient wait for HP6 in a year or two.

AT THE SUMMER MOVIES

I would not have predicted it but so far the best of the crop of summer blockbusters has been *Pirates of the Caribbean*! I was quite prepared to give this one a miss since any movie based on a Disneyland ride seems contrived by definition and neither of the boys wanted to see a movie with all those scary skeletons in it. I'm glad that I listened to my friends who recommended it.

The film is enhanced by the lead actors, especially Johnny Depp and Orlando Bloom. This is not the first time that Depp has successfully brought off performing a very offbeat character. After Edward Scissorhands and Ed Wood he is probably the only actor working today that could pull off playing Capt. Jack Sparrow quite as successfully. Orlando Bloom was unknown before *Lord of the Rings* but now appears to have a very bright future indeed. He seems to have captured the No. 1 heartthrob position from Leonardo diCaprio by way of looking really good, believably swinging a sword and actually being able to act. The last was apparently Leo's downfall. His character served as an excellent springboard for Depp's scenery-chewing Jack Sparrow. Together they are the anchor and sail that make this potentially creaky ship fly with the wind.

I had harbored hopes for Ang Lee's *The Hulk* but I also had my doubts about his handling of a superhero genre film. The end product is about what I thought it would be. Despite the clever comic book split screen transitions Lee took *The Hulk* much too seriously. Most of the critics liked *The Hulk* but I think most of the initial high marks came from critical prejudice for Lee. With films like *Sense and Sensibility* and *Crouching Tiger/Hidden Dragon* on his resume I think that critic were ready to give Lee the benefit of the doubt. In *Crouching Tiger/Hidden Dragon* we were ready to accept an ambiguous ending because it fit with the dreamlike style of the story. In *The Hulk* the climactic battle was, OK, what happened there? There was a big battle between two big hulking guys, some flashing lights and confusing camera angles. That blur clashed badly with the rest of the film in which everything else was eventually spelled out in detail. We KNOW that The Hulk/Banner is going to survive. It does not add any suspense to see the apparently drowning Hulk sinking into the ocean. I wasn't fooled by that and I wasn't fooled by this pretentious clunk of a movie.

On the other hand another film that was jubilantly buoyant was Pixar/Disney's *Finding Nemo*. I loved going through DVD extras on *Monsters, Inc.* to see just how much work and refining Pixar puts into their features. In most production companies anything so polished would be overdone and belly-up by the time it hits the screen. These guys, however, seem to be able to keep a light touch on their product while being very serious about their work. So far in my book Pixar is four for four with their feature films and *Finding Nemo* is a fine addition to the fold.

Albert Brooks was a great choice to voice the obsessive Marlin, the little clown fish that could, who must make the journey all the way from The Great Barrier Reef to Sydney Harbor in order to rescue his son Nemo from a scuba diving dentist's office fish tank. As a home aquarist for more than 30 years I really liked the scenes in the office tank where the aquatic residents conspire to foul up the filtration system. Now I know why my aquarium goes foul occasionally when I'm doing everything right! I can't wait for the DVD for this one.

I would like to know who at Dreamworks decided to go up against Pixar with their tepid version of *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas*. About all this

movie has going for it is some great vocal talent in Brad Pitt, Michelle Pfeiffer and Catherine Zeta-Jones but that can't make up for a lame story and really jarring animation techniques.

This movie used a combination of digital and hand-drawn animation that just didn't work together. The drawn ship sailing through digital water looked as badly spliced together as one of Terry Gilliam's animations for Monty Python, only *Sinbad* was not going for laughs! If they wanted to integrate traditional and computer animation they should have adopted a more computer-like drawing style so that the technologies didn't clash so much. After all one of the lingering advantages of hand-drawn animation is that it is a more flexible medium than digital animation.

Finally, despite the chilly reviews we went to see the *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. All of this film's budget went for hiring Sean Connery and for digital special effects. It would have been nice if they had spent a few more dollars on script and supporting actors though. The film stretches even summer blockbuster suspension of belief, and that's hard to do. I gave up when the bigger-than-an-aircraft-carrier *Nautilus* was tied up on the docks of the River Thames in London and then we had vampire character Mina Harker basking in the sun on the conning tower while the sub was cruising the surface of the Mediterranean. If you are going to "borrow" your characters from literary sources at least keep them true to the source.

That said there was one moment in *LXG* that almost redeemed the movie for me. After one battle Dorian Gray takes a couple dozen rounds from a machine gun displaying no more than gray rips in his rapidly self-repairing exterior. The awestruck henchman who blasted him asks in astonishment "What are you?"

"I'm," drawls Dorian, pausing for a beat to choose his words, "complicated."

If only they could have duplicated that touch a few more times in for the course of the film it might have been salvageable. Instead they repeat the howling technical error of the submarine up the river twice more by taking *The Nautilus* up the Seine to Paris and through the canals of Venice. A few flashes of brilliance were not enough to save this rather dull fare.

PARTING SHOTS

I made my annual trip to Mexico for the Panamerican Paint Show in mid-July. I guess I'm getting jaded but the trip was routine and not much more exciting than a trip to, say, Atlanta. I presented a new paper I had written during the technical seminar to a pretty good audience considering that I was the first paper of the day. When I finished the president of the sponsoring organization gave me a commemorative plaque and joked that I was getting quite a collection of these things by now and I replied that yes, I was needing a bigger office to hang all of them.

The show itself was better attended than last years and for two days from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. I was kept quite busy answering technical questions. Eastman did an interesting thing with our booth this year. They bought a larger space and then spent much less on the stand that was built. Our booth was actually quite impressive – from a distance. It was a two-level affair with a conference room and a lounge on top and then a reception area, conference table and computer on the bottom. When you looked close you could see that the construction was a bit shoddy and flimsy but we probably paid a quarter of what others paid for flashier booths that didn't have as much usable space. All told it was a good compromise between available resources and business needs.

One thing did happen that shocked me on the first night of the show. After the expo closed for the night the sponsors threw a cocktail party for the exhibitors. Last year we hired a lady, call her Alicia, as a market development representative for Mexico. She is about my age and very well respected in the Mexican paint industry having worked for several companies over her career and having chaired the Mexican Paint Manufacturers Association for several years. Everyone who is anyone in the business knows Alicia and she has opened lots of doors for us and shown us to several business opportunities.

While Alicia is not a sales rep she does have to work closely with the sales force. One of the salesmen, call him Ernesto, works with Alicia almost daily. It was a shock then when during the cocktail party Ernesto started "joking" about Alicia's age and skin color. Alicia is about 12 years older than Ernesto and, while looking quite

typically Mexican does have some Negro-like features and skin a few shades darker than Mexican average. I could hardly believe it when Ernesto started referring to Alicia's face as being black as a tire and that all of the people who stopped greet her were so old they needed life support! Alicia for her part tried to smile and shrug off what was being said but you could tell that she was not amused.

Stuff like that may fly in Mexico but I assure you it does not within Eastman regardless of where in the world you are. After seeing this display I now understand some of what has made my job more difficult in dealing with these people this year and I hope that the management takes some corrective action. I also know that by spouting off in front of an audience Ernesto has put himself in a bad position. All Alicia has to do is file a complaint and she now has three witnesses to what was happening.

On a more pleasant note The Robe Experience will be attending DSC in Chattanooga at the end of July and then jetting off to California to visit Yosemite and Redwoods National Parks in California. We had originally planned to make the trip by train but that turned out to be too expensive and very inconvenient. Amtrak has cancelled the train from Louisville to Chicago. Our only option was to catch the train in Cincinnati at 2 a.m. and then change in Chicago.

As one of the few American families taking a vacation this year I was able to find reasonable airfares from Louisville to Reno (\$200 per person) that puts us only 90 miles out of Yosemite. Hotels were also quite reasonable, probably because late July and early August are not the best times to visit Yosemite. I have never been there nor have I driven up the Pacific Coast Highway so I am looking forward to all of those things. I would have really liked to relax in the train for two days but that was not to be.

I hope that a good SFPA contingent will be attending DSC. Even though Chattanooga is only a 3 hour drive for us I have never attended Libertycon before for various reasons. I have heard many people enthusiastically recommend it so I am curious to see how it goes. If we are impressed it may replace the tepid Conglomeration in Louisville as our mid-summer convention fix.