

# Frequent Flyer

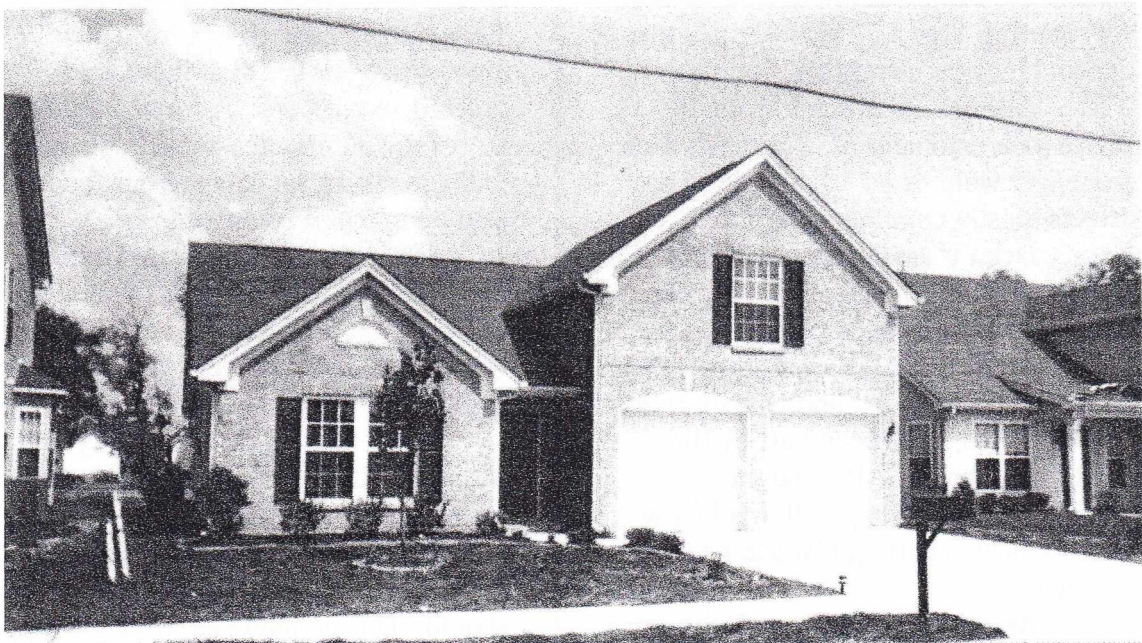
By Tom Feller

PO Box 68203

Nashville, TN 37206

[tomfeller@aol.com](mailto:tomfeller@aol.com)

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Anita and I closed on our pretty new house and moved in since the last mailing. There are three bedrooms and a two car garage downstairs and a bonus room above the garage for a total of 2,400 square feet. The bonus room has become a combination spare bedroom, sitting room, and office. We have made one of the downstairs bedrooms into a TV room and another into a library. The lawn is quite small, so we bought a push mower rather than a motorized one. Anita and I are getting a little exercise that way. We did buy a battery-operated edger after a few attempts using a pair of scissors.

Nashville has avoided the more than 500 May tornadoes so far, but we have had our share of rain and thunderstorms. I am glad to say that our house did not leak, and the lot did not flood.

Flying—

Ticket prices on several major airlines are supposed to increase \$5 each way starting June 1. This indicates that demand may be increasing.

Airlines are going to have to revise their estimates of how much each passenger weights by 10 pounds. This affects mostly commuter flights.

Delta is saving money by switching from a pension plan for non-pilots to a cash-balance plan.

All airlines, but especially American, Northwest, and United in the United States, have been hurt by the SARS epidemic. SARS and the discovery of an animal with Mad Cow Disease is also hurting Canada's tourism industry.

American is taking back the extra legroom they gave coach passengers in 2000. According to the May 22 issue of USA Today, they "will put 12 coach

seats back on each of its 140 Boeing 757s and 16 coach seats back on its 34 Airbus A300s, reducing legroom in its seats by three inches." They need the extra revenue.

Willie Nelson--

I've always liked Willie Nelson and consider "On the Road Again" to be my personal theme song, but I had never attended one of his concerts until this month. He played at the historic Ryman Auditorium, and, fortunately, we bought our tickets as soon as they were available, because they sold out.

It took place during the week, so we drove downtown around 5 PM in the hope of getting a parking place as people were leaving for the day. Unfortunately, there was a big convention across the street in the convention center, and they used up many of the nearby parking places. We finally settled on a parking garage two blocks from the Ryman.

We had dinner at a nearby honky-tonk called Legends Corner. They have dropped pizza from their menu since our last visit there, so we ordered sandwiches. After waiting for more than 30 minutes and complaining to the manager, he comped our food and also bought us a round of beers.

The music at Legends Corner consisted of a loud and not so good rock and roll band when we arrived, but they were succeeded by a very good country band that played some of Willie's songs.

We walked back to the Ryman, entered, and took our seats. Anita had warned me that it would be a rowdy crowd. They sell beer there, and quite a few of the patrons had more than they should. One woman had to be carried out during the performance.

Willie started on time and played without a break for over two hours. He

sings and plays the guitar with six backup musicians playing guitar, piano, harmonica, bass guitar, drums, and other percussion instruments. Although he never left the stage, he did allow the other musicians to solo on most of the songs. These songs were a mixture of hits and unfamiliar ones. As a general rule, I prefer the performers who just stand up and sing to the ones who feel they have to put on a spectacle. Willie is one of the former, and he puts on a great show.

#### Sherlock Holmes--

Each year Chaffin's Barn Dinner Theater puts on a Sherlock Holmes play, adapted by the owner John Chaffin, and the local Sherlock Holmes club tries to attend as a group. This year about 14 of us made it to the same performance.

If you've ever seen the movie *Nashville*, you may remember the striptease scene which takes place in Chaffin's Barn's main stage. This play was performed on the smaller back stage. It consisted of three acts which each adapted one short story: "The Red Circle", "The Cardboard Box", and "The Man with the Twisted Lip". They had a new actor (Greg Frey) playing Sherlock Holmes after one actor (Jim Wright) had portrayed him for four consecutive years. Anita said I had gotten used to the previous one, which was why I didn't care for the new one. However, I do feel that his goatee was not faithful to the description of Holmes in the stories as clean shaven. Phil Perry-Dixon, who portrayed Dr. Watson, had also portrayed him four years ago, and he looked the part.

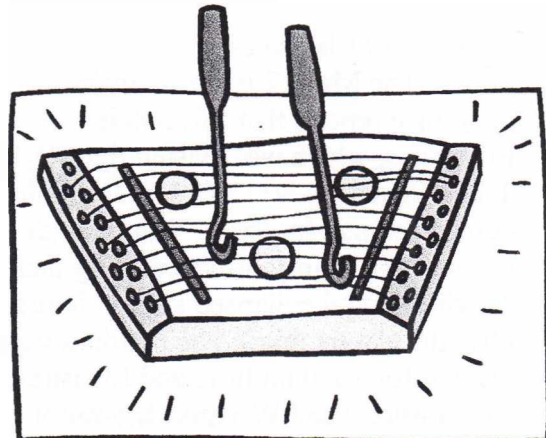
Otherwise, the acting was fine, but the stories themselves are not among the best. Clearly, Chaffin is getting to the average stories in the Canon. The

food was excellent, as usual, and our waiter, Ken Thompson, doubled as director and stage manager.

#### Grand Dulcimer Day--

This was a music festival that took place on a Sunday afternoon at Two Rivers Mansion, which is close to our new house. This is an *ante-bellum* home in the Italianate style built in 1859 that was occupied as late as 1965 when the last owner left it to Vanderbilt University which in turn sold it to the city of Nashville, which used the 447 acre farm to build two schools, a golf course, and a park.

The mansion is in good condition and can be rented for weddings, receptions, and parties. This day it housed exhibits and workshops about the dulcimer organized by a local dulcimer club.



Outside there was a stage where dulcimer music was played continuously from noon to 6 PM. We didn't know how long we would stay, because the weather threatened to rain at least every 30 minutes but never did. Anita and I arrived after it started and stayed for five hours. We were surprised by the variety of music the instrument is capable of. The selections ranged from traditional folk songs and church music to popular

ones by Cindi Lauper, Joni Mitchell, and the Beatles.

I did find the music repetitious when the dulcimer was used as a solo instrument. I thought the music was much more interesting when the instrument is used to accompany a vocalist or in conjunction with other instruments. Our favorite group consisted of dulcimer, autoharp, and guitar. The performers ranged from beginning amateurs to professionals, although none of the pros claimed to be able to make a living playing only a dulcimer. There was Bob Mize who claims to make a living making dulcimers and was taking orders. One of his instruments is in the Smithsonian and another is in the Tennessee State Museum. It made for a very nice Sunday afternoon.

Another 9/11 lawsuit—

The May 12 issue of Business Insurance reports that Silverstein Properties, which was leasing the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001, is suing the companies that insured 7 World Trade Center, “a 47-story office building that caught fire and collapsed several hours after the towers fell.” The building was insured for \$860 million, and Industrial Risk Insurers and Westport Insurance Corporation have advanced \$440 million, but argue that this was the actual value of the building and that the coverage extended to more than one building. Silverstein is suing them for the full amount of the policy.

Harry Potter—

The May 19 issue of The Wall Street Journal reported that the first printing of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* will be 8.5 million copies. To be released on June 21, it will run

896 pages, and the suggested retail price will be \$29.99. The publisher, Scholastic, Inc. will spend \$3-4 million on promotion, including “15,000 activity kits, 24,000 stand-up Harry Potter cutouts, and 400,000 buttons.” The article pointed out that this is an extraordinary amount for a book, but not that much when compared to the average movie.

## Summer Movies Part I

The summer movie season has already started, although it’s just May.

X2: X-Men United—

This is the sequel to *X-Men* with all the original cast plus Nightcrawler (Alan Cummings). Colossus also appears in two scenes, and Hank McCoy (Beast) appears briefly in a television interview.

As in the first movie, the emphasis is on Wolverine (Hugh Jackman). Storm (Halle Berry) gets to do a little more than in the first one, but she is not the star. Berry was already under contract to do the movie before her Oscar win last year, but I don’t expect her back unless her role is expanded.

This sequel assumes you’ve already seen the original and plunges right into the story, which involves a secret unit of the U.S. government determined to exterminate the mutants.

Matrix Reloaded—

This is another sequel and also assumes that you have seen the first movie. This is probably for the best as the weakest part of the original was the premise, which is that we are all in a computer simulation that derives its energy from the electrical impulses in

our brains. I wonder whether the process would take more energy than it would generate. Keanu Reeves plays Neo whom some people regard as the Messiah that will free human beings from the Matrix

## The Hugo Nominees

As usual, I am attempting to read all the Hugo nominees before the voting deadline. Here are my thoughts so far:

*Kiln People* by David Brin—

The premise is that scientists have figured out what the soul consists of and can copy it to artificial creatures made of clay. These creatures die after 24 hours, however, but the custom is for them to load their new memories back to the original person. The main character is a private detective who uses his duplicates to do the legwork while he stays home and thinks. The relationship is similar to Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe, except of course that something goes wrong. Most people use their copies for recreational purposes, especially in high risk activities without any fear of the consequences since the artificial person is expendable.

The philosophical issue that the novel raises is whether the copies are real people. Early in the story, one of the copies “goes Frankenstein” in that he acts contrary to the intentions of his original. Another copy makes a decision without consulting his original.

*Hominids* by Robert Sawyer—

The premise of this book is that whenever a sentient being makes a decision, a new universe is born. In one parallel universe, Neanderthals won out over the Homo Sapiens. An accident in a quantum computing experiment causes

one of them to transport to our world. There are two main story lines: the Neanderthal man’s efforts to adjust to our world and the efforts by his partner to get him back.

Sawyer assumes that Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens are different species and that the latter exterminated the former in our timeline, but the opposite happened in the Neanderthal world. Sawyer shows that he also knows there is a theory that they intermarried but rejects it for the purpose of this book.

Interestingly, the controversy is mentioned in the X-men movie in the opening scene in which the senior X-men are accompanying the junior ones to a natural history museum. They believe that the Neanderthals were absorbed into the Homo Sapien gene pool.

*Bones of the Earth* by Michael Swanwick--

This is a time travel story. The new twist is that it is bestowed on 21<sup>st</sup> Century humans by a species 50 million years in the future. One of their conditions is that only paleontologists and geologists can use it to travel millions of years back to investigate the dinosaurs. The main characters are paleontologists and the primary administrator of the program.

Swanwick uses time paradoxes in the style of Robert Heinlein’s “By his Bootstraps” to advance the story. People meet younger and older versions of themselves and of people they know. It’s confusing at times, but Swanwick ties all the loose ends together by the end.

I’m in the middle of *The Scar* by China Mieville, which is a sequel to *Perdido Street Station*, but with a different cast of

characters about two years after the events of the first book.

### Comments to #232

The War—

I can be called a reluctant supporter of the war. I thought the world and especially Iraq would be better off without Saddam Hussein as a head of state and was suspicious that French, German, and Russian opposition to war was based on their commercial ties with the Baathist regime. However, President Bush failed to convince me of the war's urgency, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt. I am still skeptical of links between Iraq and the Al Qaida, simply because I think that Hussein's and Osama Bin Laden's egos would not allow them to cooperate on any operation. Also our failure to discover any weapons of mass destruction beyond research facilities further reduces the need to have gone to war.

Nonetheless I am happy that the war went as well as it did for the United States and hope that something better will come of it.

Desperately Seeking Eve—

I've had two business trips to Gainesville cancelled in two weeks. The reason is that two employees were caught with their hands in the cookie jar, and I was called in to investigate.

Richard Dengrove—

The Air Force is still flying B-52s.

Anita worked for the state of Tennessee for 30 years, although towards the end she hated the work but liked the salary and benefits.

Actually, Al Gore moved his presidential campaign headquarters to

Nashville, and I think this helped his campaign.

I remember reading somewhere that Hitler was sorry the Franks defeated the Arabs at Tours, because he thought Islam would have made a better religion for Germans since it has no pacifist tradition. He felt that eventually they would have had to retreat, because they could not have withstood a German winter, but not before they converted the Germans to Islam. I think it was in Albert Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*.

If we're going to have SFPA slash, can my scenes be with Halle Berry? Anita would like Bruce Willis.

I've read quite a bit of Joseph Campbell, but don't recall anything that could be construed as pro-Nazi and/or Anti-Semitic. I do remember some criticism of Judaism, but in and of itself that is not Anti-Semitic.

Guy Lillian—

Congratulations on winning DUFF.

Actually Catbert is the evil HR director in *Dilbert*. Dogbert is ostensibly Dilbert's dog, but really Dilbert is Dogbert's human.

My brother's wedding took place in Wisconsin, which contains villages named Albany and Monticello. My mother went to Albany's high school, and my father, my brother, and I went to Monticello's. In a repeat of tradition, my nephew, who went to Monticello High, is to marry a graduate of Albany High.

I'm afraid Nashville's Sherlock Holmes conference has been cancelled due to fannish politics.

I didn't win that short story contest, just received an Honorable Mention.

Sheila Strickland—

According to my records, I have two articles in *Masterplots II: White Fang* by Jack London and *Neuromancer* by William Gibson.

We still would have preferred Chattacon over the governor's inaugural ball.

Janice Gelb—

*In Like Flint* was the sequel to *Our Man Flint*, a Sixties spoof of James Bond starring James Coburn and Lee J. Cobb. In one of the Austin Powers movies, Powers comments that it is his favorite spy film. It would be interesting to compare them. The sound of the phone ringing in the Powers movies is a direct steal from the Flint films.

Liz Copeland—

I started reading Robert Sawyer when he earned his first Hugo nomination for best novel. I found that I like his work very much. I consider him the favorite for the Hugo, because he lives in Toronto and is popular with the fans there.

Anita has planted petunias and marigolds in our new yard. She tried to plant roses, but they didn't take root.

Toni Weisskopf--

Actually the photo in the January mailing was of our empty lot.

Hank will be pleased to learn that the first class of pilots licensed to carry firearms in the cockpit recently graduated from a special class at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick, GA, which I visited once by the way. A few years ago, my company's food service division applied to run their cafeteria and was one of the five companies invited to

make a presentation. I was on the team as the PowerPoint "expert". I don't consider myself an expert in the program, but I learned enough to help out.

George Wells—

I had originally made our reservation for DSC at the Legacy Inn, but then found out they were overbooked and moved us to the Howard Johnson's.

Michael Caine has won the Oscar twice in the Best Supporting Actor category: First, for *Hannah and her Sisters* and then for *Cider House Rules*.

Adrien Brody was the thin man you saw receiving the Oscar in the Best Actor category for *The Pianist*. Eminem was not at the ceremony, nor was his nominated song performed, but he won anyway.

Don Markstein—

I'm not afraid to use the delete key on spam, although I usually block the address and report it to AOL's spam police first. I've also blocked entire domains, but they were ones with names like "porno.com", "buttsex.com", or "mortgage.com". I've noticed fewer and fewer spam messages with unique domain names. Most of the ones I get are from large ISPs.

From a business's point of view, the problem with spam is that it wastes valuable resources. An article in the May 5 issue of *Information Week* quotes a Ferris Research estimate that spam costs American businesses \$10 billion annually. One common technique that spammers use is to hack into someone else's e-mail server and use it to forward spam in order to disguise the origin. There's also the problem that possession of pornography in the workplace is evidence of a sexually hostile

environment and can be used against a business in a sexual harassment lawsuit.

At work, we've had trouble with balancing our attempts to minimize spam without blocking legitimate business messages. Our MIS (Management Information Services) director once blocked all messages with an exclamation point. Unfortunately, marketing people like to use exclamation points so we were losing sales leads.

Our e-mail system does block messages that contain words like "penis" and "vagina". We can't block "mortgage", however, because every one of our hotels has one, and we can't block "dick", because it's a common name. I objected, but was overruled, when he blocked "Viagra", so I had to put out a special memo explaining the drug's status under our substance abuse policy. (OK with a prescription, not OK without a prescription. The bottom line is that it will not result in a positive result from a drug test.)

The May 19 issue of The Wall Street Journal had an article about anti-spammers. These are hackers who target spammers. One example was a hack into Optinrealbig.com's (mortgages, adult products, Viagra) phone system that caused all their phones to ring simultaneously. Another attack consisted of sending 15 million e-mails to one spammer in one night. Although the actions of the anti-spammers are illegal, it is difficult to be sympathetic toward the spammers.

Richard Lynch—

I think that Internet e-groups are also a threat to apas. I'm in several with one on Sherlock Holmes being the most active. The main advantage is that you usually get replies to your postings within 24 hours. The disadvantage is

that most of the replies are not well thought through or well written.

Randy Cleary—

I started but failed to finish *To Say Nothing of the Dog* by Connie Willis. It was a Hugo Award winner, too.

David Schlosser—

Transfers of power in the old Soviet Union and in Communist China have generally been made by political maneuvering within the politburos of both countries. The only violent episodes occurred when Khrushchev had his rival Beria shot and when the successors to Mao put his wife along and the other members of the Gang of Four on trial.

Re Janice's back problems:  
Anita hurt her back recently by sliding into a restaurant booth.

Jeff Copeland—

I don't think you can blame the French military collapse in 1940 on their casualties in World War I. Germany had at least as many.

Norm Metcalf—

Thanks for printing the letter from Harry Warner. I hope it's not the last one I'll ever read.

Mike Weber—

I can understand that a man could get injured taking off a woman's bra. A man should not be wearing a bra in the first place.