

N'APPA



The Stepford Infants Assembly Line

223

The Official Organ

#223

Next deadline: September 15, 2015

N'APA rises again from the dead. Like the Vampire Nostradamus, it just keeps coming back.

The official collator is George Phillies phillies@4liberty.net

N'APA is the Amateur Press Alliance for members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F). As it is distributed in PDF format, there are no dues or postage fees. It is open to all members of the N3F within the restrictions stated below in the Rules and Regulations. If there are members interested in joining who have no computer access, special arrangements are possible. People who only want to read are welcome to ask to be added to the email list. Check with the official collator, who is George Phillies, 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester MA 01609 phillies@4liberty.net 508 754 1859 and on facebook.

Currently the frequency is every other month, with the deadline being on the fifteenth day of odd-numbered months. The mailing will normally be collated in due time, as the collator is retired. Publication has always been totally regular, though some readers question my interpretations of "totally" and "regular".

N'APA has been in existence since 1959 and recently transitioned from being a paper APA to an electronic one.

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In this issue:

Cover Art...The Stepford Infants Assembly Line - Image courtesy Lauren Clough

The Official Organ #223 George Phillies - 1 page

Synergy #1 John Thiel - 5 pages

Robot Octopus vs. Beatnicks from Mars #3 Jeff Barnes - 3 pages

The Silver (State) Age Kevin Trainor - 1 pages

Notes from a Galaxy Far, Far Away Lorien Rivendell - 5 pages

Archive Midwinter Jefferson Swycaffer - 2 pages

The Murdered Master Mage #6 George Phillies - 3 pages

SYNERGY #1

Designed for the NFFF Amateur Press Association



Editor is John Thiel

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*"We bid you all the very best, and that ye be merry, from our eyrie
upon these celestial plains, or is it planes; anyway, best wishes to
Seti and Napa both."*

Welcome Back

The title is a notation about myself (though it could be said of NAPA too). There aren't that many people who were in the N3F who were here when I was, but there are some. These are qualified to say "welcome back" to me, but the others can do it also, with some use of the imagination. I was here in the 1980s, during which time I was the head of the Fan-Pro Coordinating Activity and the editor of Ionosphere, the official magazine of the Fan-Pro Ac, and I was also in NAPA, which at that time was presided over by Tom McGovern, the collator. My NAPA zine at that time was called Rocket Fuel, done on mimeograph. Now I am an Associate Member, and was pleased to find I could enter NAPA with that status. You'll want a photo of me.



That was taken some while back at the Gus Grissom Air Base here in Indiana.

Here's Comments on the Napa Zines I've Seen

0-0: For many years I have been cultivating my yard so it would look like something and lately I have achieved a kind of jungle effect, which is what I wanted to have to individuate my property. Now my yard looks a bit like Leng, which is better than when it used to look like Arkham. So I see the familiar in your photo, Mr. Phillies, though I'm not looking at it in the right way, I guess, to see the Triffid.

Notes From a Galaxy: It may be said that we are all far, far away, in the mode we practice. You're right I know what a Samsung is, I have a motion picture camera by Samsung, but my net screen is by Dell. I miss the old InTel Celeron. Myself, I like to leave behind a part of a book for the author to continue to work with. Note to Jefferson Swycaffer: I wish I could describe New Concept books to you, where I first saw one of your paperbacks.

Silver State: That's mankind for you, always building up, tearing down, building up. Kerouac quoting Joyce in DESOLATION ANGELS: "'making buildung supra buildung supra buildung'...that's all it is..DUNG!"

Octopus vs. Beatniks: SF is going over good with the populace around here. I made a comment about what my niece was playing on her car tapedeck and it turned out to be GAME OF THRONES. She was right there to put me down when I mentioned direwolves as if they were something new without a history. How can your *fiancée* help but love you as you sit sharing CALL OF CTHULHU? A letter I received from Fritz Leiber way back told me all about how he and Harry Fischer were friends.

I hope we are all friends now since I have commented on your mailings. I'm a new member, trying to feel wanted, trying not to feel I am the stranger.

Not a neofan either, unless there are permanent neofans.

Further Questions and Reflections

Got my access riding, now I've a few questions I'd like to ask about NAPA, considering that I've not been around for a long while. First, I'd like to know if everyone in the N3F receives it. I recall that Ionosphere had a problem with this; a new President told me that I couldn't call it a National Fantasy Fan Federation publication because it wasn't distributed to the total membership. I told him that I was seeing that everyone saw it in groups of ten, ten extra copies of each issue, but he said that wasn't good enough. I knew they didn't all see NAPA either, but didn't feel like mentioning that. Anyway, the reason they didn't all see NAPA was that no one could come up with that many copies. But here on the net, it seems to me it would be no problem to email it to all the members. I hope this is done, because it would be an increase for the NFFF, and also give those of us who are in it a wider range of viewers.

Second, does NAPA keep, or does it intend to keep, annals of the runs? I know that over at efanzines, where they include both TNFF and Tightbeam among their fanzines, they have access to previous issues. I've also seen apa mailings over there. I'd like it if there were history files of the zines. I've got a zine over there (The PDF DRAGON) and they have a file of four issues, with the fifth one coming up. Fanhistory, over at Facebook, is suffering a lack of background and I think if we have not preserved the past adequately in fandom, now's the time to start doing so, although some of the current sf stories might contest this. I'm reading Greg Benford's BEYOND INFINITY, and in that there's people keeping historical libraries, and they are in tremendous disorder—maybe he was comparing this to fannish culture. So that's what I have to ask, and I think I'll save further questions for later on and bid *adieu*.

It's nice being here for the first time, and I'll look forward to further mailings.



Robot Octopus vs. Beatniks from Mars #3

For N'APA #223

Jeff Barnes

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Greetings! Looks like it's that time (a few days before deadline) again, so I had better get in gear.

First off, I want to thank you all for welcoming me into the fold, in your comments. I do appreciate that! I hope everyone is having a good summer. I am continuing my efforts to get my fiancée as interested in SF and fantasy as I am. A couple of weeks ago I showed her the film *Fantastic Planet* (the new Criterion edition) which she liked and said would be a good film to show to sociology classes. She doesn't teach

sociology, but she does teach community psychology and abnormal psychology, in addition to being a practicing psychologist.

I mentioned last time that I had shown her all the Gamera movies (including the rarely seen *Gamera the Brave*), which inspired me to write the following bit of whimsical verse:

Ode to Gamera

Twinkle twinkle, Gamera.
I wish I had a camera
so I'd have conclusive proof
that you flew over my roof.

I wish I could see you fly
every time I look at the sky.
Not only are you jet propelled,
you're also impregnably shelled.

You can fly with wondrous grace
in the sky or in outer space.
You wouldn't hurt a tiny mouse
but you'd gladly destroy Gyaos.

You could burn us all to death
with a blast of fiery breath,
but there's no cause for alarm,
for you'd never do us harm.

You've saved us from every threat.
We are always in your debt.
We feel safe when you hurtle.
You are Earth's guardian turtle! - Jeff Barnes

COMMENTS

Lorien Rivendell: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and *Batman* (1966) are two of my favorite movies. The former is a classic, of course and the latter is, as you said, so bad it's funny. I love the 1966 TV show, too. I took it seriously when I was a kid (and it was all the rage in the mid-1960s) but now I love it for the campiness and the pop art look.

Kevin Trainor, Jr.: Glad that your trip to Minnesota went well, even though the convention was a bittersweet experience.

George Phillies: Wow! You have Triffids in your yard and I have pods in my basement!

You are the second person who has recommended John Ringo to me. Guess I will have to check his work out!

I saw *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane* many years ago, but I also saw the American version.

THE SILVER (STATE) AGE #2

an APAzine for N'APA 222 by Kevin Trainor, Jr.

May 17, 2016

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Rushing about in all directions, much like a decapitated chicken...

I am afraid that my original intention to quickly dash off a timely reply to the previous disty fell prey to the time pressures of tax season, and then a bunch of other stuff happened. To quote Steve Martin, "I Forgot."

Anyhow, tax season wrapped up on the 18th of last month, and for once I made more on the draw than I earned from Block on commission. Fortunately, they're not going to ask for the difference back, though I suspect I may be working in a busier office next year, at least part time.

Hard on the heels of tax season came the annual trek to Minnesota to attend Anime Detour, the Twin Cities anime and manga convention I helped found back in 2004. It was a bittersweet trip, since our ancestral home, the Fabulous Thunderbird Hotel, since renamed the Ramada Inn Mall of America, had finally been sold and was closing on the first day of Anime Detour, shortly to be torn down to make way for an expansion of the Mall of America. Some of my fellow Detour staffers managed to salvage memorabilia from the auction, so I'll have a room number plaque for the old Volunteer Consuite and a wall map to remember the hotel by. We had four good years there before we outgrew it, and much of what we became was shaped by our time there. If you're interested, Minneapolis pop culture maven James Lileks has some pictures of the hotel in its glory days on his website at lileks.com; while they had removed some of the stuffed animals by the time we moved in, most of the Indian-themed decorations were still there, and you might argue that my succeeding there, we scored a kitschy coup over the other local SF and fantasy conventions.

Since returning from Minnesota, I've been busy preparing to drive for Uber and actually driving these last two weeks. Demand for Uber here in Las Vegas is strong, and I've been able to earn about \$50 plus tips per night, which will improve my cash flow and give me some decent tax writeoffs to offset them come next tax season.

I will reserve my comments on N'APA 221 for the next zine.

NOTES FROM A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY #5

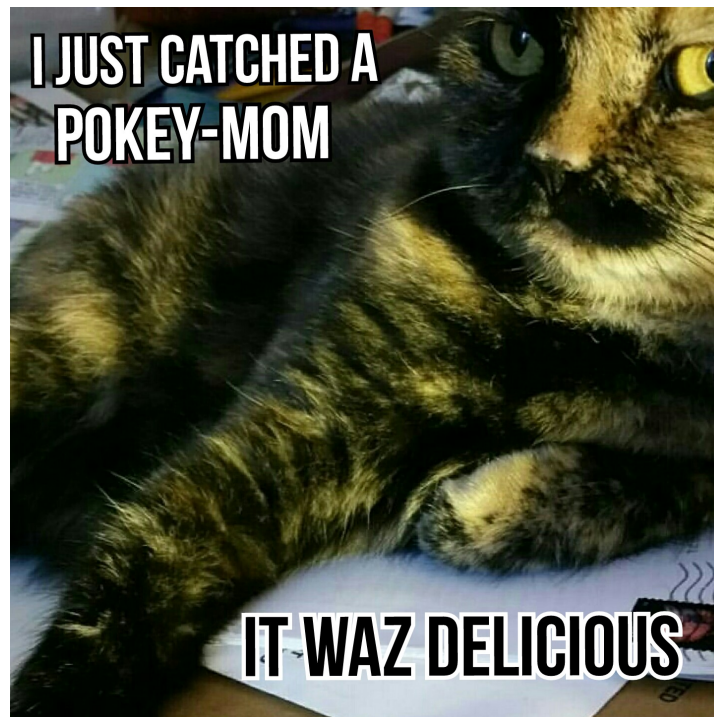
July 2016

For N'APA 223

Lorien Rivendell

(Lauren Clough)

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Random Natter Just to Make Deadline

I decided to take my tablet to sit by the river so I could work on my latest N'APA contribution in fresh air and sunshine (okay, I'm cramming in the shade). It's hot and humid, but the breeze makes it nicer outside than inside.

While I don't knock nice days, we do need the rain every once in awhile. I believe we are officially in a drought. We got rain for about a day and a half last week and we were supposed to get some severe storms today. We may still get something, but it looks as if the severe weather will miss us. I won't mind that part.

After about 2 hours by the river, it did start raining. I walked home in the gentle rain. There were a few grumbles of distant thunder, the rain got heavier, then it all stopped. It feels a little cooler inside, at least by the window with the fan.

Techno-Freakout

Technology always manages to taunt me. This morning, I taught a CPR/First Aid class in a building different from the usual one (I teach it through work, as part of our training department). I booted up the computer and found the mouse and keyboard. Both are cordless. The keyboard worked and the mouse was dead. I had taken it from the charging cradle, so I thought it should work. I consulted with the office manager, who changed the batteries. The mouse lit up and worked. Then we didn't have any sound for the video. I finally figured that out - we have two wall-mounted monitors in that room, and one monitor's volume didn't work, but the other one did, but it had been turned all the way down. Then every video portion of the presentation ended a few seconds early. Every. single. one. And there was frequently a delay in starting the videos, because the little wheel would just spin (did I mention we have Windows on our computers?). The rest of the class went well and we got out early.

I opened a new Google Doc on my tablet to make this issue of NFAGFFA and, for some reason, I was told I didn't have permission to edit it and that I needed to contact the owner. Huh? I thought maybe I clicked something inappropriate, so I opened another new document. Same thing. Then I opened up the WiFi hotspot on my phone and connected my tablet to the internet and now it's happy. For now.

My tablet updated this morning, the second time in 2 or 3 days. I don't know if that has anything to do with it not liking Google Docs all of a sudden. At one time, I could use Google Docs offline without issues.

After I got home, I opened the document on my Chromebook and added to it. I had some photos on my phone I wanted to use, so I opened the document on my phone. I added 3 photos and then opened the document on my Chromebook to do the final touches and convert it to .pdf. Only one of the photos would open on my Chromebook. I checked my phone. All 3 photos were still there. Check my Chromebook. Only 1. Back and forth: 3. 1. 3. 1. I tried closing and reopening the program. I tried going in through Google Drive. I tried making a copy of the document on my phone. No go. I cannot have more than 1 photo in this document. Even opening this document on my phone after updating it on my Chromebook without all the photos shows all the photos on my phone. I just don't get it.

While it's not the end of the world not to have the photos here, I'm beyond frustrated with computers today.

NaNoWriMo

I'm participating in the National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) July Camp. In the regular NaNoWriMo, which is held in November, participants must write 50,000 words of a novel within the month. In Camp NaNo, participants can choose their word counts and they can write anything they want. I'm working on a memoir in July, which is a continuation of what I worked on in April. I chose a goal of 10,000 words in April and "won." I chose the same goal for July. I'm not particularly motivated to write in the summer, as it's much more fun to be outside taking photos or reading or just goofing off. Anyone interested can go to nanowrimo.org or campnanowrimo.org.

Sigh

I just noticed that I didn't get the date right on NFAGFFA #4. It was meant for May 2016 and I had written May 2015. I guess I was in my own time machine.

Reviews (or Ramblings)

Movies

Back to the Future, the Michael J. Fox movie from 1989, is currently on Netflix. I was excited, because I had been watching for it to show up on one of the services I subscribe to. I had seen it once, years ago, but didn't remember much about it. It was interesting, okay. Maybe 3 out of 5 stars.

Minions is currently on Netflix. It's a rather stupid movie to further promote the franchise. They really should have stopped at *Despicable Me*. 2 stars. I'm feeling generous.

TV Shows (or, more accurately, Streaming Shows)

"True Blood" is on Amazon Prime. I've seen 2 or 3 episodes and find it okay. I'm giving it a chance. I gave the first book in the series a chance and lost interest after the first couple chapters. I am finding the series a bit better. We'll see if I keep watching for the duration.

"The Munsters" from the 1960s is on Netflix. What's not to love about this goofy, ghoulish family? I enjoy watching an episode or two when I don't have the time or attention span for a longer show.

“The Incredible Hulk” is the one from the 1970s, now on Netflix. I binge on this every now and then. I loved it as a teen and find it okay now. It’s not great, but the Bill Bixby of nearly 40 years ago isn’t too bad too look at.

“Between” is a show exclusive to Netflix, apparently. I’ve seen 1 of 12 available episodes. I’m not too sure about this show, but I may give it a chance. A mysterious disease inexplicably kills everyone over the age of 22. Okaaaay. How does the disease discriminate by age? I think the premise is pretty silly.

On my watch list for someday is (are?) the various “Star Trek” shows on Netflix and “Dr. Who” on Amazon Prime, among other non-SF/F-related shows.

Books

Harvest Home, by Thomas Tryon. If you like horror novels that sneak up on you, this is one I am sure you will love. It was probably all the more horrifying back in 1973, when it was first published. A lot of novels and movies since have borrowed from it, making reading it now rather predictable. Still, I really enjoyed it and would give it 5 stars.

The Deceiving, by Ninie Hammon. This is the second book of The Knowing series, and I thought the second book topped the first. There will eventually be a third book to finish the trilogy. I should mention that I received an advance copy to read and review before the book was published in exchange for an honest review. The books are about demons, which some people can see and/or hear. Some people just *know*. The premise of this book is to battle the evil and to keep an evil man from being placed on the United States Supreme Court. 5 stars.

The Girl Who Heard Demons, by Janette Rallison. I got this one for free by voting for it on Kindle Scout. Most of the books I vote for do not get chosen for publication. This book did. The premise is a high school girl hears demons and must keep her school’s quarterback from getting killed. I liked the premise, but the execution was just a bit preachy at times. It read as a Christian novel that wasn’t too over the top, but got close at times. I liked the idea of the book better than the actual book, but I didn’t dislike the book enough not to finish it. It is definitely geared toward teenagers. Adults may enjoy it, but there are many children’s books that are better written for adults to enjoy with their limited time. 3 stars.

Comments

Cover Art: I saw *Day of the Triffids* way back in the 1980s. I'm waiting for it to come to one of the streaming services I have a subscription to. It looks like you and your neighbor have a bit of a jungle for yards. Beats mowing. I hope you aren't having the drought we are "out west."

Kevin Trainor, The Silver (State) Age: It sounds like you do stay busy, both in and out of tax season. Off-season stuff sure sounds more fun. I'll bet Uber could be a pretty lucrative enterprise in Las Vegas.

Jeff Barnes, Robot Octopus v. Beatnicks from Mars: I sometimes think I need to expand my own horizons in SF/F. Someday...time is short for exploring too far. Unfortunately.

Zootopia is *already* on DVD and streaming through various services. It seemed to be in theaters longer than other movies, and it also seemed to be released on DVD sooner. That may be my imagination, though.

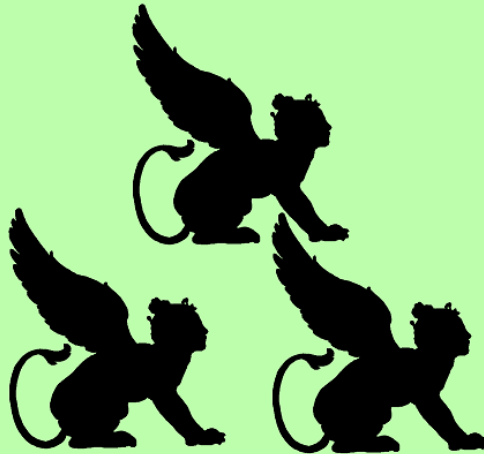
George Phillies, The Murdered Master Mage #5: Interesting tidbits on Barbarella. It's also very cool that you are friends with the inventors of Dungeons and Dragons. While I have never played the game - nor have I had the opportunity - it seems to be a wildly popular game that has withstood the test of time.

Re: "The Girl Who Saved the World" and the lack of parental units: I don't recall now if her age was stated, but I got the idea she may be in college or the equivalent. Old enough not to need parental supervision. Is she actually a teenager? While the title calls her a girl, often "girl" is used by adults ("I'm going out with the girls tonight"), so I just figured there was some leeway. Anyway, I'm glad you are plugging away at the story and posting chapters here.

Archive Midwinter
a zine for N'APA 223
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4 July 2016



Mailing Comments:

Lauren Clough: I've been mighty tempted by the Kindle Fire. Does it play movies?

Definitely agree with the huge advantages of modern tech in time-saving, such as pausing movies, recording stuff for later, etc. The ability to go back a few seconds and catch a line of dialogue we might have missed -- or just pause and go to the bathroom -- it's all light-years better than ever before.

rect me, I've only done watercolors once...and the result was actually kinda nice. My high school art teacher liked it enough, he put it up on display in the teachers' lounge. I had to nerve myself to ask for it back when I graduated. My sister has done all kinds of art: oils, chalks, even steel engraving. Art is fun! I still draw now and then, but not as much as I used to, largely in a cartoonish style.

I haven't yet put Improve Each Shining Hour up on Amazon; I'm sort of dragging my feet. Gotta get snapping! Hup hup hup! Right away! Move, move, move!Maybe after dinner.

Kevin Trainor Jr.: Interesting that Anime Detour has outlasted the hotel! There are a handful of conventions I attend that have survived their original hotel. The American pace is always changing!

Jeff Barnes: re Samuel Delany, I have a friend who hates Delany's writing so much, he refuses to read anything by John Varley -- because Varley wrote Titan which sounds like Triton which Delany wrote. How's that for animus!

I was very young when movie monsters were hot and hip. I used to see old copies of Famous Monsters of Filmland published by Forrest J. Ackerman -- and they scared me! I was actually too cowardly ever to see any of those movies. Now, of course, they aren't terrifying, just comfortably thrilling.

Super nifty that you knew Harry Fischer, the "original" of the Gray Mouser!

George Phillies: I don't think I knew that Christopher Nuttall was a N3F member. I read Ark Royal and quite enjoyed it!

Nifty that you knew Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson! I jumped on the D&D bandwagon very early, and have never regretted it. (Well, only a little, as the role-playing phenomenon killed off board wargaming, which was my pre-RPG passion.)

(I'm astonished that there aren't many computer wargames, sims of battles like Gettysburg or Waterloo. Yeah, there are a few. Sid Meier did a monstrous great big huge gigantic Gettysburg that is absolutely unplayable. I bitterly regret having paid for it.)

This installment of The Girl Who Saved The World is, as I've said before to you, most noteworthy for the delicious contrast between the protagonist/narrator's suite of incredible super-powers and her mundane, everyday, approachable lifestyle at home. Doing hyper-advanced mathematics...then microwaving a bowl of stew.

News

Apologies for missing last-ish! Yikes! I've been very good, all my life, with deadlines, and am very sorry to have overlooked an entire issue. My bad. There will be a spanking party.

I sold a story to Fred Patten for one of his upcoming anthologies. The anthology is "Gods in Fur," and, yeah, it's furry. That's great, because so am I! My story is "The Gods of Necessity," with the moral lesson that necessity is mightier even than the Gods. It's a flippant little story, involving a cat/bear/anthro and his sidekick, "The Toucan God."

Fred Patten is a lovely chap, and a mainstay of Furry Fandom. He had a nasty stroke some years ago, and went through medical bankruptcy -- lost everything -- but he fought his way back, and is editing anthologies. He invited me to submit something to his next one, "Dogs of War," military stories with a furry theme. I sent him something involving uplifted Rattlesnakes. Do Rattlers count as "furry?"

Out on the trails, I saw a really lovely Rattlesnake, for reals: a *Crotalus Viridica*, a lovely soft green with dusty yellow markings. I couldn't get a good angle for a photograph. Another bloke was leaning in way too closely, trying to get a pic. I think he was within striking range. Oh, well!

I also saw a charming Roadrunner, who politely paused long enough for me to get a picture, but the pic didn't come out well. He wasn't moving, but I must have been. Or else he was so fast that he's blurred even when standing still!

A Brief Excerpt from "The Gods of Necessity"

"We've got wishes?" Ajax asked.

"Yes. Three. Kind of traditional."

Ajax rubbed his jaw with his hand. "Well, I wish..."

"Ajax!" But her shout was too late...and, a moment later, it was too late twice.

"Oh, poop," Ajax said, his voice very small and filled with contrition. That didn't make things any better.

Where it came from, didn't matter. It was an indoors avalanche of dung. Manure, fewmets, ordure, scat. Horse apples and cow pies and rabbit pellets. Some was dry and crumbly; some was fresh and syrupy. It lasted for a good two minutes, sinking deeply into their fur and skin. It worked its way into their eyes, and, inescapably, their mouths. Celea gagged, and was roundly sick. Ajax spat and spat again, but somehow kept his stomach from turning. Before long, it was impossible to tell that Celea had been black and white, or Ajax white all over: both were stained a ghastly melange of browns, brindles, and tans.

Almost...almost...Celea blundered by crying aloud, "I wish you hadn't said that." It was close.

The Toucan God laughed immoderately the whole time, his raucous cries of villainous joy high and rasping, a cacaphony of wicked delight that bordered upon insanity.

**The Murdered Master Mage #6
for N'APA 223
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NAPA 222 Comments

Front cover: yes, that is my garden, a photo taken a year or two ago, but the house is the house next door. And, no, I do not know who was kind enough to give me a baby triffid.

Notes From A Galaxy Far, Far Away #4: I'm glad I was able to connect you with someone who knows something about chrome. With respect to time, I am reminded of the line I heard many years ago: I'm retired. I'm considering going back to work in a full-time job, so I will have more free time. However, in point of fact the thing that chews up the largest amount of my time will be going away in under three months. At that point, I will have much more time for writing. In a certain sense, I will be discovering that after having worked on things for 20 years we've gone around in a circle.

I confess that I very rarely see a movie. I occasionally watch television, though in the past several decades the only television show I watched reasonably regularly is the new Supergirl. Very rarely, I will break out a videotape or disk. With respect to books, I regularly read whatever David Weber, Chris Nuttall, L.E. Modesitt, Harry Turtledove, Jack McDevitt, or Barbara Hambly writes. I am occasionally baffled as to why McDevitt refers to one of his series as the Alex Benedict series and not the Chase Kolpath series. I piously hope that Rosemary Kirstein will return to the Steerswoman series, but I'm not betting on it.

The Silver State Age #2: I confess I see tax season from the other side, namely our dear state and federal governments showing up to relieve me of my hard earned via careful investing retirement savings. It's so generous of them to make sure that I don't have too much money to spend. I would be most interested in seeing a con report on Anime Detour, both here and for The National Fantasy Fan. Your efforts on recruiting more members for us are most appreciated.

Robot Octopus: I had not realized that there were 11 Gamera movies. Supposedly one of them is extremely rare and hard to find. You have certainly found an ingenious way to romance your fiancé. I am of course happy to read that you are enjoying *The Girl Who Saved The World*. I have rewritten the very beginning. A couple of readers missed what I thought were the obvious clues that Eclipse is all of 12 years old.

Chapter Four

The Wells Residence
Arbalest Street
Medford, Massachusetts
Evening
January 12, 2018

For the Wells family, dinner approached completion. Wind from the blizzard rattled the tree branches and whistled through the house's ornate eaves. All the blinds in the breakfast room were pulled, covering three walls of glass with honeycomb fabric.

"That was really good Indian Pudding, mom," Janie Wells said, pushing pitch-black falls of hair back from her ears. Her much-taller year-older sister Jessamine Trishaset nodded enthusiastic agreement.

"Thank you," Abigail Wells said. "My recipe, but Brian did all the work. And grades? It being that day for you seventh and eighth-graders?"

"Mostly A's," Trisha said. "Except Gym. C-. GR, I have to be really careful not to give away I'm a bit faster than the other kids."

"I suppose faster than sound qualifies as a bit faster," Patrick Wells remarked. "And it's good of Sunssword to go flying with you." Trisha's father took off his glasses, and waved them in one hand. "Your mystery patron supplied you, all three of you, with garb that does hide who you are. Or would have, if you two hadn't given things away."

"Da-aad," Brian complained, not quite seriously. "The other choice was getting stomped flat by a giant robot. It could have appeared anywhere in Massachusetts, and it just had to appear right in front of my school. Besides, I got A+s on

everything. GR, they won't let me get way above grade level yet, not like you, Trisha, so you have a disadvantage."

"It's not way above," Trisha answered. "And you get the same next year."

"To answer your question," Janie added, "I got straight As on my exams, well, mayhaps not A+s in all of them. Except Romeo and Juliet makes absolutely no sense at all. I just wrote down what I memorized from those other books. You were right, Dad. Finding those other books helped a lot. But if I had crossed out half the 'not's in my sentences, what I wrote would have made exactly as much sense. The teacher said it was enough extra books, not just one, and I could name them, so I got my A. How did you do it, Brian? How did you pull an A+? We read the same extra books."

"Oh, I added stuff about 'the unbearable agony of separation'. Whatever nonsense that is. I lifted it from one of Trisha's romance novels," Brian said.

"I only have one romance novel!" Trisha interrupted defensively. "It's a reading assignment. For my genre fiction requirement! It's unbearably awful. It's even worse than that Russian thing."

"Sorry," said a chastened Brian. "But you see, it was good for something. Your sacrifice, you read it, got me an A+."

"You talked about, yuck, romance novels? You think I can get an A+ if I insert something intelligent instead? I could talk about Chess or City of Steel or outward influence on my next English exam." Janie noticed her parents shaking their heads.

"I lucked out," Brian said. "I guessed Romeo and Juliet had something to do with romance novels. I can't tell what. I wasn't really sure."

"What if I try inserting some of the instructions from one of your model ships..." Janie's voice trailed off. She looked distantly into space for half a minute.

"Jane Caroline," her father finally announced, "We know you are a telepath, and so are some of your friends, but having them interrupt dinner is as rude

as answering a Bell phone while we are eating." Patrick Augustus Wells never raised his voice, but his tone was completely clear to all three children.

"Daddy, that wasn't a friend," Janie answered. Her father raised his eyebrows. "Well, she's friendly. And she has friends with her. That was Krystal North, herself. You know, Krystal North, the lead of the American Elite Persona League. She was here two years ago. That was when Trisha and I got kidnapped. She wants me to forward a mentalic call to you, Daddy. The Speaker wanted to talk. Privately. I had to get across: We're having dinner. He has to wait. She said they are in D.C. I said back this is Massachusetts, and that's better. Massachusetts created America. She was a bit stubborn. But I was more stubborn."

"Speaker?" Patrick asked.

"Speaker of the House," Janie said. "Speaker Ming. The top guy in Congress. He was very polite about asking if he could interrupt. He said it was very important. I said I'd have to ask," Janie answered. She decided not to mention that Krystal North was still listening. Her parents already had those looks on their faces.

"What is going on?" Janie's mother asked fearfully. Abigail Wells wished her children had been less involved in persona events, even if none of them had been their fault. "Have you been doing the persona thing again? Blowing up more robots? And not telling us?"

"No!" Janie realized that she was at the edge of getting into really deep trouble, for something that was not her fault. "No, Mommy. And the robots last December were trying to kill Brian and me and our whole class. I didn't do anything. Speaker Ming wants to ask me about City of Steel, and needs your and Daddy's permission to talk to me."

"I suppose you should be honored," Patrick Wells said. "I didn't even know the Speaker plays City."

"I think he doesn't," Janie answered. "He didn't sound like he did. That's his private business. I shouldn't've said. It's one particular move. The one Eclipse used to win. It's the move I pulled on Kurchatov, only better. I was saving that variant for the National, and... Now Eclipse used it first!"

Janie pounded a delicate fist on the kitchen table. “No one knew about that move. No one.” She pounded her fist again, then looked momentarily thoughtful.

“Dear, dinner or not, the Speaker is a very busy man,” Patrick said. Hopefully, he thought, my daughter did not insult him too much. “Perhaps you should forward what he has to say, to all five of us. And you two bite your tongues.” Patrick looked meaningfully at his other two children.

“GR,” Janie said. Suddenly the other four members of the Wells family saw, standing directly in front of each of them, a tall woman wearing white garb with copper-green trim. Her black hair had a widow’s peak matching Janie’s. Standing to her right was an elderly gentleman, balding, silver-haired, smiling, eyes sparkling, dressed in the scarlet gown and cape assigned by law to the Speaker of the House. “My apologies,” Speaker Ming said, “for having intruded, and I hope that young Janie here is not in any trouble as a result of my intrusion, but the hour seemed late enough to be after dinner, though I see I was mistaken, and the urgency of my interruption is indeed great. In any event, the issue is that the Bearer of the Namestone played City of Steel against the Lesser Maze and used a novel move, rather a move that was novel until it was traced back to Miss Wells here. I gather that the Bearer actually played a variation on Miss Wells’ original move. There is great interest in what light Miss Wells can shed on the move. My own position, which I have been heard to say repeatedly by the press, is that the Bearer took the Namestone fair and square, so she now owns it.”

“Janie knows how to reach me once you decide on an answer,” Krystal North added, “but unfortunately time is of the essence. From the number of hits on the web pages of City of Steel Review, in particular the pages corresponding to Janie’s games, a large number of other people would seem to have figured out the same thing we did.”

“I get a champion, don’t I?” Janie asked. “Someone who makes sure no one takes advantage of me?” Krystal North nodded in agreement. “GR, I know exactly who to ask. Who’s questioning me? If Dad and Mom agree?”

“The North American champion,” Krystal North said. “The Visitor. That’s Kurchatov and Hornpiper. Speaker Ming. I’ll provide mentalic support, to keep people honest. We’re ready in an hour. However, it’s up to you to agree or not.”

Janie caught Krystal North’s nod and broke the link. “Daddy, mommy,” Janie said, “I could hear what was behind her thoughts. She thinks something bad probably happens to me very soon now. Tonight, even. Unless I agree. I get to ask a friend to our house. Someone to protect me. If they question me. Daddy knows Professor Lafayette. That’s a good choice of champion.”