

# N'APA 227



Eldritch Science  
To Rise from Dead

# The Official Organ

## #227

**Next deadline: May 15, 2017**

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](mailto: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. If there are members interested in joining who have no computer access, special arrangements may be 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](mailto:phillies@4liberty.net); 508 754 1859; and on facebook.

I occasionally send a copy of N'APA to the accessible (email address needed) N3F membership, in the hope that some of them will join N'APA.

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, but has transitioned from being a paper APA to an electronic one.

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Oh, Good news. Christine Schults, grand-daughter of long-ago Neffer Gertrude Carr, has sent us modestly under a foot thickness of old N'APAs. For example, in the batch is clearly a copy of issue #1. They are being forwarded to David Speakman for scanning.

# Synergy 5



**NATIONAL AMATEUR PRESS ASSOCIATION**

**MARCH 2017 MAILING**



Ⓟd

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### **Editorial Musings**

Going through the priorly received mailing on N'APA now, the better to refresh my memory of what was in it, the concept involved being doing comments on it...It's in my files—My, what files can preserve if indeed one is successful at preserving them—a full mailing of N'APA! In real files someone would say, "Look at yore files—yore filing cabinet, man! Bulky, messy!". Anyway, here's George's notification of the issue and yes, the mailing is still there. The usual work tools on the side, but clicking the file into "read mode" gets me an unobstructed view. There's the Fanthology with its beauteous cover (if one will *see* and accept its artistic qualities); in my opinion the "75 Years in the Making" is Swycaffer speaking. One gets over one's scare that the contents of the mailing will be the fanthology instead of the Napa zines and scrolls down to the approved contents.

That's a rather disappointing contents page, only Lorien Rivendell and myself along with George Phillies. I think that the non-contributors aren't helping this apa to recover, and hope that I will see them back in this forthcoming mailing, but that's like hoping against black magic, disasters are now known to continue. Maybe if I caressed my luck piece I'd feel more optimistic.

I've been making out pretty well in the N3F, much to my surprise. It started when George invited me to join N'APA, then took an interest in my comments in Synergy about the old Fan-Pro Activity which he suggested I resurrect. There could be no better persuasion than for someone to want one to do that, and I got together an issue of IONISPHERE, which was successful enough to make me the head of a bureau. Then my suggestion that we advertise in the magazines got approval from the Board of Directors and I was drafted into the recruitment activity along with the present recruiter. Also there was an invitation to volunteer as a director, which I did and became one; not only that, but I was promoted to chairman of the board of directors. So that's three positions in the N3F, bureau head,

recruiter and director. Adding to that, I submitted a story to the story contest and a couple of stories looked at by the Writers Bureau, and when Eldritch Science ever comes out, George says a poem I wrote will be in it. A letter in the recent TNFF, Bob Jennings had my fanzine reviewed in Tightbeam, my reports have appeared in TNFF, and I'm in the Round Robins, tweet tweet, Fly Robin Fly. That amounts to plenty of activity, and I can call myself active in the NFFF. Which it's good to be, rather than just sitting there. I'm also seen at the NFFF's Facebook page. I prefer to make a good thing of my membership in the NFFF.

### **MAILING COMMENTS**

**NOTES FROM A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY:** Nice article, Lorien (I see you are a medievalist). George and I are listening. The heading reminds me of the Time Machine I built in my yard when I was ten or eleven. It was an old shed for tools and gardening equipment for which the garage was used instead, and I installed various equipment in it salvaged from a pile of mechanical junk we found out in the woods. (When I went back there in the 90s it was difficult to find where those woods had ever been and also to get out of the car to investigate. There it was, the future of that spot where the time machine had stood.) Prominent within it was a clock and some auto engine parts, which I told people was essential to my concept. Both timepieces and automobiles influence and change the nature of time. A clock establishes and maintains and expresses time, and when a clock is referenced time is being worked with. An automobile creates various dimensions, so to speak, of time; a man traveling in an automobile has different time references and time activities than a man walking. (I was considered a child genius back then, but as I grew older I lost that reputation.)

A telephone also influences time activities, and when I saw your photo I was highly struck by it (highly: intellectually, not physically clobbered), and that brought all this back to mind.

Driverless cars, I think, may represent the future well, from the point of view of a time tripper from the past; but I think they range beyond practicality and are too far-out a technological advance—an idea that may

as well be scrapped before it scraps everyone who buys it, having the crucial faults that you point out. And you couldn't have said it better when you pointed out that we can't even maintain ground traffic well enough, and that flying cars would wipe out the sanity we have left in regard to traffic. Around here the traffic, not to mention the vehicle owner regs, is so bad I've ceased driving a car. There'd be computers involved in all of that, and not only can we not rely on them, we can't rely on our handling of them either. The technology has exceeded our capacities. I'm glad to see someone saying this for once. Usually people are too busy discussing the technology's presence to discuss its implications...and complications. All one notes is the cursing about that last.

Discussing time reminds me of time problems everyone says they have. Now it's "How could I possibly join an apa, I don't have time for it!" What, no time for an eight page apazine, let alone a one-pager? Then I notice I've spent two hours already writing this far, uninterrupted work except for smoke breaks to relieve the tension of writing; perhaps that time that's needed is for people to get their thoughts moving. I guess time is, in fact, pressing us closer and closer as we sit in this high-speed civilization. Less and less time to *do*, to *be*, as we operate the computers we've contracted to use. Is the speed-up of civilized living that was once talked about going to speed us all into oblivion? (I was talking to former N'APA head Tom McGovern, and he just couldn't find any time at all to even be in Napa any more, though he did join the N3F. For awhile he wasn't even looking like himself on Facebook, because all his time was devoted to an alternate role involving religion.)

Movies only in your reviews. No books? Why don't you locate and buy one of Swycaffer's and review it? That'd be Review Power here. They've got all the action of a Star Wars flick, except authentic cinematic action. In answer to "You really should consider it," you should consider a Jefferson novel. But I can't get to the movies any more than you seem to be able to get to the books. I'd say I've had all I want of INTERSTELLAR's plot in printed story form. Ever read DARK SECRET by Edward Lerner?

**THE MURDERED MASTER MAGE:** Or George Phillie's stories, for that matter, to back-reference to my remarks to Lorien. I've reacted to your remarks on activity in my opening comments. Always glad to be active, it's so much better than being dormant. Say, with all the *ennui* in the NFFF and elsewhere, it's my chance to be active. I was being crowded in the N3F before, always looking for a chance to move in—TIGHTBEAM seldom published my letters, the editor was talking about too many letters to publish them all.

Even a few new members will be a success—if they have enough energy to answer an ad, they might also be active.

Well, that's that on the issue—I've got several other matters that need taking care of, or I'd talk at greater length. Maybe I'll do that next issue.



Spacecraft visits Arkham





Archive Midwinter  
a zine for N'APA 227

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12 March 2017

### Mailing Comments:

**Cover:** Hooray for [A Sea of Stars Like Diamonds!](#) For years now, I have wished that the winners of the N3F Short Story Contest could be anthologized, and George has made that dream come true!

**OO:** I apologize for missing a few issues. Highly embarrassing, as I'm usually pretty good with deadlines.

**Lauren Clough:** I'm still highly skeptical about the near future of self-driving cars. In a few decades, maybe, but not in the next few years. There are simply too many unforeseeable obstacles that the very best Artificial Intelligence of our age cannot deal with. How about lane closures? What if a tumbleweed rolls across a highway? We, as intelligent drivers, know to just plough on ahead through a tumbleweed, rather than slam the brakes for an emergency stop. But will an AI system? What if a dog runs across the road? We, as humans, have to balance a whole bunch of intangibles. Kill the dog? Slam to a stop? Swerve? How big is the dog? If a deer runs in front, we know not to hit it, but a doggie?

At this point in time, I do not believe such issues can be programmed.

re ROKU...what the dickens is ROKU? Okay, from Google, I know. So I just looked it up, on a nice site -- What is Roku, for Luddites. And...yeah, I'm going the Luddite route here. It looks like a jolly fine product, but it ain't for me. (I cut the cord to TV entirely; when I have a spare moment, I read.)

(Or write...)

re the drought, although we in California just had some astonishing rains, it seems mostly to be surface water, and hasn't sufficed to replenish the deep ground water. My sister's ranch had severe erosion damage...but the well is still dry.

The San Diego River (laughingly so called) really did go into flash-flood mode. It picked up good-sized trees and threw them around, dug ditches across roads, dragged a foot-bridge downstream twenty yards, and overflowed another bridge. It ran over the top of the Old Padre Dam, something I'd never seen. And this is the same river that was bone-dry for much of 2014!

re employment, I actually enjoyed the Registrar of Voters gig, but it was grueling and quite dull. I'm now employed again at a health insurance company as a "claims examiner" -- fancy title for a data entry clerk. Not as grueling, but so very complicated it is highly daunting. There are about 100 things that can go wrong with a

claims form...and they've only taught me 40 ways to fix them. (So far. Each day they teach me something new.)

**George Phillis:** Eldritch Science may be a fanzine, not a prozine, but if it's an N3F zine, get in touch with me and maybe I'll submit something anyway!

I just came from ConDor, San Diego's longest running science fiction convention. It's small; we had about 550 people all told. Jolly fun! A "relaxacon." Lots of old friends, although quite a few new friends too. At one point in one of the discussion panels, a nice chap (a professor of literature) idly threw out the idea, "What if Dr. Frankenstein had read the Necronomicon?"

I started writing that story that very night. I haven't yet finished it, but I'm about 2/3 through now. I think the idea would be perfect for Eldritch Science, but I'm afraid my story will be too long for comfortable inclusion in the collection. Still...let's talk!

re writing styles, I agree that 2nd Person is often a distraction; there are only a few stories where it really works.

(One example is "Betelgeuse Bridge" by William Tenn. The narrator really is talking to someone. Not "you" but another character in the story. It works.)

I also have deep suspicions regarding 1st Person. I think it should be used very sparingly, and that there needs to be a damn good reason for it. Dick Francis and Roger Zelazny were extremely good at it. Others...not so much.

While I'm griping, I also don't like Present Tense. I find it distracting, and I see very, very little point to it. A pen-pal of mine just finished a novel, written entirely in Present Tense, and, to my mind, that's a big detriment to the story he's trying to tell.

This segment of "The Girl Who Saved The World" is friendly and comfortable, showing the characters at home, just chatting. It's a "normalcy" segment, that fits nicely between action segments. Finding the balance between "talk" and "fight" is one of the trickiest things in adventure fiction. Sometimes the cowboys are in a gunfight...but other times they're sitting around the campfire talking about the girl they left behind. It heightens contrast and builds drama. But, doggone, it can be hard to do right!

(Anything can be done...if done right!)

**John Thiel:** I'd never heard the numbering system, by which the N3F is 8th fandom and your notion of a synthesis is 9th fandom. I kinda like it. I definitely like the idea of a fusion. I'm glad that there is still a healthy place for conventions, and gathering in person. I hope that does not go away.

(It is starting to go away in role-playing-gaming groups. I know of several groups where some people attend physically, and some via Skype. Personally, I do not like this. It divides the group too much into "sheep and goats." Also, if the guy on Skype is to be heard, or to be able to hear, everyone else in the room has to be silent. And being silent is not natural to groups of fans in one room!)

I'm not at all sure what I would say fandom "is." A community of interests? Certainly, to some degree. Maybe more of a community of outlook? We all like different things, but we like to like things, and fandom is largely about the sharing of exuberance itself. It's fun to be around people who are enthusiastic in their joys. The world can be such a depressing damn place, being with people who are happy is uplifting to the spirits.

re role-playing games and wargames, there is an old truism taht people game for different reasons. In RPG, there is the classic division into role-players, power-gamers, "munchkins" (which often just translates to "trouble-makers," and wargamers. The role-player

is there for the drama, and is often the best actor. The power-gamer wants to be invincible, to stride the world like a colossus, to have a +8 warhammer. The munchkin wants to see what happens if you yodel real loud in a cavern with a sleeping dragon. And the wargamer wants to solve the tactical problem in the most effective manner.

I am a wargamer. I want to "solve the puzzle." I want to watch the battle unfold, and throw in my reserves at the right moment. I'm the guy who tries to optimize the "marching order." I want battles to be played out on an actual map, so I can clearly see who is adjacent to whom, and what the ranges are between shooters and targets.

re classic board wargames, I confess, I was never very good at them, but I loved them dearly. (The hobby is all but dead these days; at least I certainly haven't played such a game in decades.) I love the gestalt: a map, little counters representing the forces, explicit rules on movement and combat...and an opponent, who is trying to defeat me, just as I am trying to defeat him.

Heck, it's just chess, amped up to be more complicated, and with random factors built in!

### **Books!**

Per a reference in another fanzine, I tried reading Dashiell Hammett's Red Harvest. I enjoyed it, and it inspired me to read his two most famous books, The Maltese Falcon and The Thin Man.

The Maltese Falcon was almost exactly like the movie! (Which is to say, of course, the movie was almost exactly like the book.) Very enjoyable, although a bit murky in some details. (If O'Shaugnessy's partner had the bird all the damn time, why the big fuss about hiring a detective and trying to outwit Gutman? Hire a negotiator to broker a deal with Gutman. The whole affair is

unnecessary! All of the killing, all of the intrigue, served no real purpose.

The Thin Man was even murkier. I was never really clear what the heck was going on. Also, it lacked the spirit, the panache, of the Powell and Loy movies. In the movies, there's witty repartee, clever and witty exchanges, and a lot of incidental humor. In the book, there is very, very little of this. Nick spends nearly the whole damn book not answering questions! In scene after scene, someone asks him something, and he deflects it, often unartfully. "Who do you think did it?" "Well, who do you think did it?" Extremely unimpressive. This is a case where the movie is quite a bit better than the book.

A friend suggested The Hangman's Son, by Barry Longyear. It's a fairly straightforward police thriller. The protagonist is a cop, trying to solve a series of (grisly) killings. The details are largely believable, although as one gets farther and farther into the book, the events become less and less plausible, and the ending is totally a fantasy, having no possibility whatever of happening in the real world. The characters are engaging, but the outcome is absurd.

I'm still on my A.E.W. Mason jag, reading my way through everything of his I can find. (He's been gone long enough, most of his work is available free, public domain, and for that, nowhere on earth is better than Project Gutenberg. If you have an e-reader, please do yourself a wonderful favor and explore Gutenberg! For me, it is heaven-on-earth!)

Mason's character, Inspector Hanaud, is one of the inspirations for Agatha Christie's inspector Poirot. Mason's stories are absurdly intricate, highly detailed, and highly complex. They rely just a bit too much on coincidences. But his characters are believable and engaging.

The Silver State Age #4

an apazine for N'APA 227

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## **OBLIGATORY NATTER**

My godfather (Dad's youngest brother) died two weeks ago Friday, which meant I had to drop everything, scrape together various shekels, pennies, and kopecks (to say nothing of various 1's and 0's claiming to represent these things) and buy a plane ticket to Boston. Fortunately, my daughter lives and works there, so she was able to pick me up and haul me from the airport to Bradford, the small town where my paternal relatives mostly live, and we got there in time to attend the viewing despite rush hour traffic. The funeral was the next day, followed by the burial and lunch in lieu of a wake. This was just as well, since most of us in attendance either had to work or were exhausted from the strain of the proceedings. I stayed at my daughter's apartment on Friday since the airfares back to Las Vegas were too expensive, and wound up flying out of Manchester Saturday afternoon after a large breakfast at the Galley Diner in Southie, which if you are ever in Boston deserves your patronage.

Like most family funerals, I had mixed emotions - on the one hand, I was sad to lose one of my uncles, but on the other hand, funerals have long been one of the few times that our family gets together, so I look forward to seeing the relatives.

The tax business has been its usual difficult self. There have been days when I've been busy from start to finish, and other days when I get to sit in my cube for eight hours and not see a single paying customer. I have mostly stopped doing Uber during tax season, although I pushed myself on Saturday and Sunday before my uncle's funeral because I really needed the money. I'm not sure I want to do more of it this summer; hopefully with the economy picking up, I can get a temporary position in the accounting field to tide me over until next tax season.

I have watched exactly two movies since my last apazine. Hacksaw Ridge was an excellent movie about Desmond Doss, the first conscientious objector to win the Medal of Honor, and while it did fiddle with some of the details, it mainly stuck to the truth and portrayed Doss' devotion to his faith accurately and sympathetically, which is rare these days in Hollywood. Mel Gibson did an excellent job with this, and the battle scenes are depicted with Gibson's trademark brutal realism. Shall We Dance?, on the other hand, is a movie that really could only be made in Japan, since its plot revolves around the embarrassing subculture of ballroom dance. (There is a remake with Richard Gere, but I'm not watching it.) The tale of Mr. Sugiyama, a salaryman lured into dancing by the sad figure of a woman in the window of a dance studio is touching and occasionally hilarious as it shows the changes in Mr. Sugiyama's life and relationships as a result of him taking up ballroom dance.

I've also been doing a lot of reading, but the bulk of that has been re-reading John Ringo's Posleen War novels and various works by Keith Laumer before bedtime.

## LUNCHTIME SPECIAL: LEFTOVER APA COMMENTS, \$2.25

*The Murdered Master Mage*: RAEBNC

*Archive Midwinter*: RYCTO George - I, too, have a lot of the old SPI games. Makes me wish San Diego wasn't so far away so we could get together and play them.

*Synergy*: I'm embarrassed to say that I completely forgot about those ads, and had no idea what you were talking about in your e-mail on the subject when it arrived. :(☹☹ I think the diminishing number of SF magazines (and their dwindling circulation) is directly related to the lack of bookstores (SF or otherwise) that carry them. I travel 2-3 times a year by air, and I don't recall the last time I saw a copy of any SF magazine at Hudson's or the other airport magazine vendors. On the other hand, Cirsova, which is trying mightily to relaunch pulp SF, looks like it might be here to stay. Your suggestion of a list of websites that review SF and post about fannish doings is a good idea - File 770 needs competition.

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*Notes From A Galaxy...* I have to agree with you about flying cars. People are a threat to life and limb as it is, just operating in two dimensions. ☹☹ I was fortunate enough to see *Interstellar* at the Air & Space Museum's Udvar-Hazy Center (they have an impressive IMAX theater) thanks to my friend the Audiovisual Archivist, and I liked it well enough. It didn't strike me as being very hard SF at the time; one suspects that if you poked hard enough at the underlying science it would fall apart, as it was more a "magical thinking" kind of tale with SF trimmings. ☹☹ I have been afraid to watch *The Borrowers* because I loved the original books so much and am sure the movies can't come close. It's the same with the movie version of Lloyd Alexander's The High King and the books that lead up to it.

RYCTO me: The delayed refunds were only for people claiming certain credits plagued by fraud, and that's all done with. If you need help, let me know. ☹☹ You can get an approximate sense of how good/bad your passenger is by their rating (yes, we're encouraged to rate our passengers) and in fact some more experienced drivers have encouraged me to avoid trouble by not accepting calls from riders below a certain score. Unfortunately, you have no way of knowing if someone with a brand-new 5.0-rated account is going to be a jerk or throw up in your back seat. So far I've (mostly) been lucky; nobody's lost their lunch in my car yet.

*The Murdered Master Mage* RYCTO me: WRT The Fifth Season, I'm just going to say that the Hugo Awards ain't what they used to be, and leave it at that. Ms. Jemison has been enough of a harridan online that I have no interest in reading her work, award-winning or otherwise. ☹☹ I thought it was clear from the context, but I was referring to WSFS specifically, although Lord knows there are plenty of local fan organizations with the same problem.

*Synergy*: So we (N3ffers) are what makes up 8th Fandom? We are, perhaps, the active members, but there are other fans who came to SF by different doors who haven't found us yet. We're working on that.

RYCTO me: I actually don't gamble very much, and haven't put a lot of effort in reaching out to the local gaming groups. Maybe if I get a normal job this summer instead of driving through the night for Uber.

Your comment on having a key to wind up your computer reminds me of an outfit called Qwerkywriter, which sells keyboards made like old-fashioned manual typewriters.



## **The Murdered Master Mage #10**

**for N'APA 227**

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**NAPA 226** (mostly) Comments: indeed, our fanthology is indeed with us, and one or another of the independent publishers has even sold two copies of it. That's actually good. We can be grateful to Cedar Sanderson for giving us the beautiful cover to A Sea of Stars like Diamonds.

**Notes from a Galaxy Far, Far Away:** Self-driving cars will probably take longer than self-driving trucks. The trucks will have assigned drivers, but the drivers will not do anything. Apparently it is already the case that self-driving trucks are better than conventional trucks that do not have good drivers, namely they maintain even speed better, they obey traffic laws more closely, they stay in their lane, and all sorts of other things. I note, however, that the various self-driving cars in California have accumulated enough passenger miles that you can make legitimate statistical statements about their safety. They appear to be considerably safer than human drivers though not perfect. As a result of the self-driving cars actually driving themselves, some calculable number of human lives has apparently already been saved.

With respect to flying cars, though my answer also applies to self-driving cars, the answer is that instead of using lane markers you use locally enhanced GPS signals. These are already in use on some golf courses. They are mounted in the golf carts, with local transponders embedded in the ground, and as a result the golfer knows exactly where the nose of his car is with respect to the hole in the ground which he is attempting to place his golf ball. When I say exactly, the error is in inches or a foot. It is, however, still the case that self-driving cars really do best on interstates with extremely well marked lanes, and a minimum of complications. I am reminded that about a decade ago the Army had a self-driving truck project. The notion was that a self-driving truck would not get lost, have its driver decide to take a break, be as expensive in damages if it were hit by something, counting the human casualties, and so forth. At the time, the truck was able to drive 2.5 mph over

irregular terrain. Of course, they probably tested it over a rock field, not over something seriously irregular like Boston streets. Nonetheless, at the time I remarked that thanks to the progress of Moore's Law by around now the truck would be approaching ready to drive in interstate traffic. I was right. They are in use in Europe on a limited scale.

I have a stereo set with all sorts of musical recording things, CD player, tape player, vinyl record player, connection to my cable system, and I have a computer on the Internet. By your standards that's extremely minimal. I find it to be quite adequate though. With respect to closed captions, I am reminded of the New Hampshire TV station that was doing cc and had the statement "facing lagging cookie sales, Girl Scouts move to new sales techniques." The image, which showed up while the cc person was typing, showed a half-dozen soldiers armed with machine guns kicking down the door of the house in some benighted Middle Eastern country.

Sorry you were confused by Jessamine Trishaset. As this is a superhero novel, most personae — the superheroes — have a minimum of two names, their private persona or secret identity, and their public persona or superhero identity. Well, some of them actually have more than that, because they have more than one superhero identity. Professor Lafayette is also another superhero.

For many years, I have had an accountant do my taxes for me. This year she informed me that the cost of the required fees, licenses, computer software, certified classes, et very tedious Cetera had gotten so expensive that she could no longer afford to perform the job, since she was not working full-time at it. For her it was an evening job on top of her real day job. As a result, I had to purchase a copy of TurboTax and figure out how it worked. I was mostly successful, except it refused to speak to my email systems, so after spending some frustrating time, I carefully printed up my tax returns and mailed them in. The modest check payable to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts I am sure they will find because I carefully placed it on top for them. The large check from Uncle Sam I am piously hopeful will eventually show up, perhaps, even during my lifetime.

The N3F is indeed trying SF magazine ads, and they have brought in at least a few members. Are they paying for themselves? Since we are not a for-profit organization, it is not quite clear what that question means. In a certain sense, “running a profit”, meaning that our cash on hand goes up over the year, means that we made a mistake. We did not give the members everything they deserved. We will need to do better.

Synergy 4: That’s a respectably impressive piece of art. It took me a moment to realize one is looking at a double star system with two planetary bodies of some sort fairly close to where they would eclipse the stars in question. It was very well done. It has recently turned out that on a star relatively close to the earth, an M class dwarf, one finds parked in the habitable zone not one not two but seven planets. The planets are extremely close to a very dim star and have orbital periods measured in days. There was some suggestion that under favorable conditions you could actually see the planets moving across the heavens. As a speculation, the reason this system has so many rocky planets close to the star is that the system apparently does not have a gas giant. Gas giants are apparently, I speculate, not very good for the rocky planets, in the tidal forces will tend to eject the smaller rocky planets from the solar system, casting them out forever into the starry and dark void of outer space.

Sympathies on Comcast. I have Charter, which has a much higher reputation than Comcast does. There were rumors that my city might move from Charter to Comcast, but there was extensive public protest based on Comcast’s superb reputation.

You mention Lovecraft. I am reminded of a colleague who taught all sorts of things, and at one point had students read from Lovecraft. He reported that the only time he had ever had a student revolt against an assigned reading was when he gave them “In the Mountains of Madness”, which they thought was so terrible they objected to their having to suffer reading it. He decided to give into them.

### **The Girl Who Saved The World:**

“Is it dangerous?” Abigail asked.

“In this world, nothing is safe,” Morgana answered. “Someone has placed a geas, a construct, on your house and its residents. That’s everyone in the house. Having a geas like that in your house is almost certainly dangerous to you. Yes, geas, a stable third-order construct. It controls what you think, about a narrow range of topics, inobtrusively. Leaving it there, now that you know it exists, even though you can’t remember what the topics are, is probably even more dangerous. To remove it, I need a blank sheet of paper and a clean table.”

“Got it,” Trisha announced. The suddenly clean table had a large sheet of blank paper on it.

“Three of you will see nothing. Abigail, Patrick mentioned that your grandmother on the O’Rigamy side had the second sight, so you may see a blue haze. Janie, you will see clearly what I am doing, but you should absolutely not, not even if it’s life and death, try anything like this, not until you know exactly what you are doing. Clear? And the rest of you, don’t interrupt.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Janie managed. She was not a boy, she told herself. If she was warned not to do something, because it was way too dangerous, she wouldn’t give in to temptation the way a boy would. Well, not Brian. He was almost sensible enough to be a girl. *<Can you teach me how to do...whatever it is? Or at least protect myself?>* Only Morgana heard her question.

*<Yes. But not soon. Sorry. Unless you want to give up games. Talk later.>*, Morgana answered.

*<Ulp? Later.>* Janie answered. Give up games? That was *undenkbar*, *nevoobrazimy*... and she realized that studying German and Russian so she could read their games literature had suddenly started to work.

“Good.” Morgana touched the paper. “Nin amner morgoth.” To Janie’s eyes, a point of blue light appeared on the page. Morgana tapped the paper again. “Nin amner calirath.” Another point of light appeared. Morgana continued her chant. When she touched the fifth point, the light from the points flowed out, forming a star etched into the paper, surrounded by circles within which burned words in a script Janie did not recognize. To Janie’s eyes, the words seemed to move, curling into and out of



the page. “Now, all of you, try to remember Joe’s home address. Good. Wait.” Morgana gestured above the circle, her fingers making an intricate cat’s cradle that wove in and out. Janie saw what her siblings did not, bands of light and lines of text connecting Morgana’s fingers. The lights vanished. The circle faded away, to Janie’s ears like the tuning fork that once struck faded and faded but never quite stopped. “All done,” Morgana announced, slumping back in her chair.

“What were you doing?” Brian asked. “Are you all right?”

“That,” Morgana announced, “was a third order attack in use. Until I erased it. It made sure that anyone in this house would not think that Joe could have a home address or interlink ID, let alone wonder what they were. It also made sure that no one would think it was interesting that Joe here was the same as Joe who rescued Janie and Trisha. The attack followed him around, within a mile or two, so no one else would wonder.” She leaned back farther in her chair. “I’m all right, but it was very solidly embedded.”

“Who could do that?” Brian said, not quite making it sound like a question. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

Morgana threw up her hands. “At a guess, Joe’s mom. But I don’t know who she is. ‘Cartwright’ is not a persona I can name. Almost no personas can do things like this. I don’t remember that any of them have children. And thank you for asking, Brian. Perhaps another cookie, please? That was more than a bit tiring.” Brian handed her three cookies, the first of which rapidly disappeared.

“You much look as though you need dinner,” Patrick announced, “and you three young ones need to give us a private conversation. Your grades from Morgana, remember?”

“Yes, sir,” Brian answered. “Forward to modeling.” The three children headed upstairs.

“And now, Morgana,” Abigail said, “we are going to hear our children’s grades, on your coaching them with their gifts, and you are going to get a reasonably solid dinner. And the specialist support you arranged for Trisha. Dinner was not meant as a suggestion. Young people like you are too careless

with eating properly at the right hours.” Abigail turned to the sideboard and began bringing dishes back to the table.

Morgana looked at the ceiling. “Patrick, you really didn’t tell your dear wife what you know about me through the tenure committee, did you? I know you promised, and I understand that you Americans are very strict in respecting the privacy of private personas, but under the circumstance...” He really had not told his wife, she thought, and that bit of New England propriety was about to create an interesting conversation.

“Young lady, that is *we* Americans,” Abigail said, “since Patrick did mention that you were an Englishwoman but had taken American citizenship, just like several of my ancestors did, five and seven centuries ago. Yes, Patrick has completely respected the privacy of your private persona, enough so that I knew there was a Professor Morgana Lafayette, and I knew there was a public persona Sunssword, but I had never met you, the Professor, to know that you were Sunssword. And now you have half of a roast chicken, shoe peg corn, sliced potatoes with sautéed onions and sour cream, and what is left of the tossed salad with Roquefort dressing. Oh, yes, several croissants with butter. Brian was too busy with his cooking to snatch any of my chocolate fudge, which is just as well as it would have gotten him into all sorts of difficulty. Now I can sit down and hear what is going on.”

“I hope you don’t mind I eat while we’re talking,” Morgana said. “There are ways to cheat on eating, in an emergency. Your cooking, from the smell, is absolutely wonderful, far better than the alternative. My cooking has never poisoned anyone. Well, recently. At least, not accidentally. In any event, to use a line almost as old as I am, the kids are just fine. The worst problem was that Janie has an extremely rigid and accurate sense of gifttruth, at the level that leaves people paralyzed with fear that they have done something wrong. She got over the fear. Fortunately, she got over that before The Emperor Roxbury’s robots showed up at her school, because she had to do something violent to deal with them. She did. She’s absolutely fine.” And in a few moments I get to explain just how she overcame her fear.