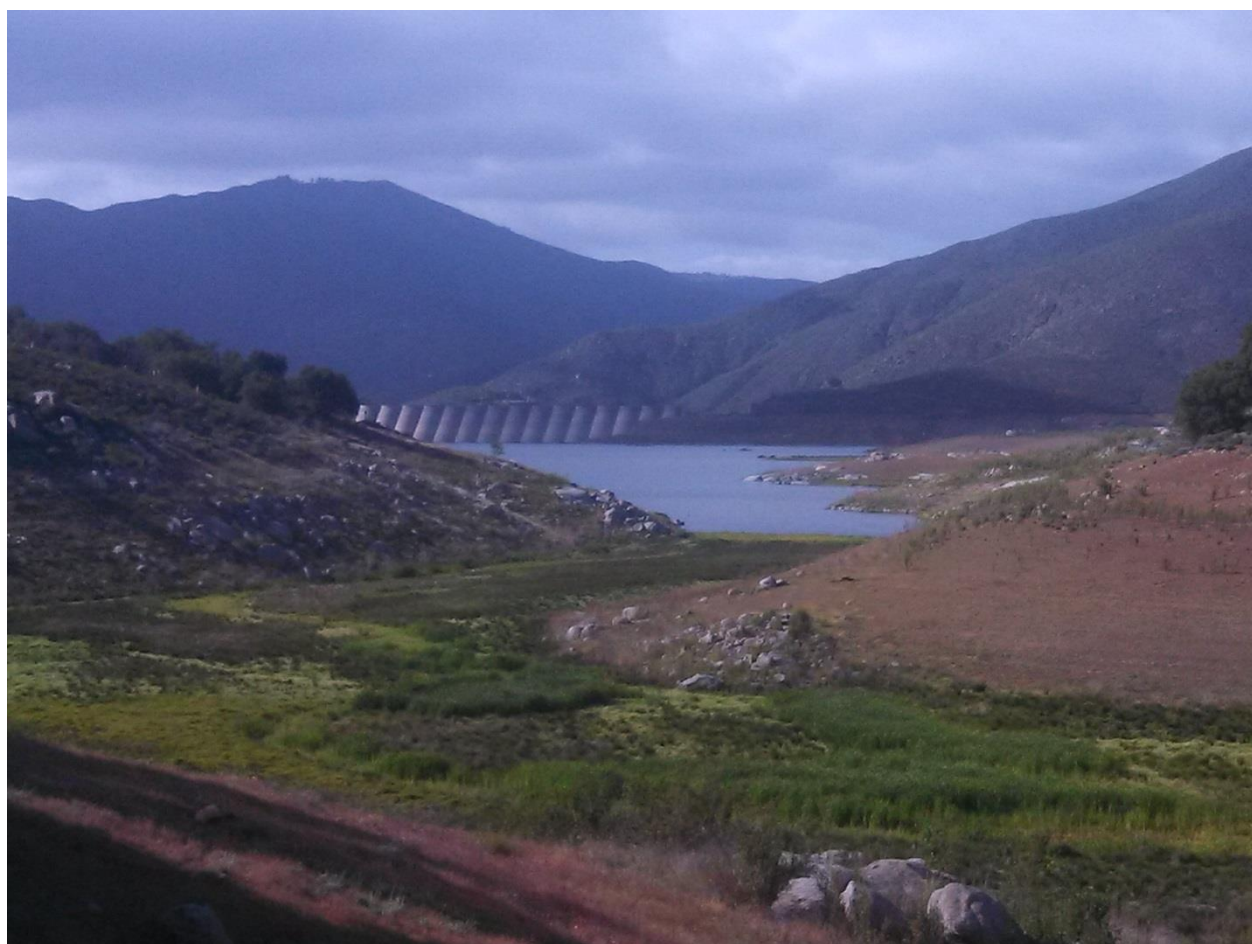


# N'APNA



# 221

# The Official Organ

## #221

**Next deadline: May 15, 2015**

N'APA rises again from the dead. Like the Vampire Nostradamus, it just keeps coming back. This is the Recollation; I managed to lose Lauren's zine in the first pass.

Jean Lamb has gafiated. We hope that she will be back soon. Another competent OE would bemost welcome. Until then, 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 except as necessary for mailing paper copies. 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 currently George Phillies, 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester MA 01609 [phillies@4liberty.net](mailto: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 for a number of years and recently transitioned from being a paper APA to an electronic one.

#

In this issue:

**Cover Art...**A photograph from Jefferson Swycaffer. We thank him for sending artwork.

**The Official Organ #221** George Phillies - 1 page

**Archive Midwinter** Jefferson P. Swycaffer - 2 pages

**Notes from a Galaxy Far, Far Away** Lorien Rivendell 4 pages

**The Silver (State) Age** Kevin Trainor - 3 pages

**.Robot Octopus vs. Vampires from Mars** Jeff Barnes - 3 pages

**The Murdered Master Mage #4** George Phillies - 4 pages

Archive Midwinter  
a zine for N'APA 220  
by Jefferson P. Swycaffer  
P.O. Box 15373  
San Diego CA 92175

(619) 303-1855  
abontides@gmail.com  
jpswycaffer.com



13 March 2016

### Mailing Comments:

**Lauren Clough:** Maybe taking painting classes, you say? Do you paint? What are your favorite media? I love the scent of oils, but don't have the skill for it. I can do a halfway decent watercolor...but haven't actually dabbled in four decades or more.

I liked "Let's pretend this is a castle wall." That's one of my favorite games at Disneyland. I like to take a few minutes to sit by the front facade of Sleeping Beauty's Castle and pretend that I'm leading a medieval army to siege or storm the place. Let me tell you, the defenses are tough! (Best to go around behind, through Tomorrowland.)

We're never too old for "Let's Pretend!"

**George Phillies:** Your note about the writer in a group who didn't think that spelling or grammar were important, "because her editor would fix everything," gave me a pained grin. I've never had the misfortune of meeting anyone quite that cocksure, but I do know a guy who didn't want to bother teaching his son to read, because "Books are archaic. They're completely obsolete." Fortunately, no one listened to him -- and the kid is now grown up and in college!

As it is, newspapers are close to obsolete, but they're still maintaining relevance, if only barely.

Your introduction of the ambassadors to the League of Nations is remarkable. It's a wonderful historical anachronism, a kind of assembly without regard to any real epoch. That they are in a modern world, with superheroes no less, makes it even more surreal. I adore the pomp, and especially the costuming, as you describe it. The vast self-importance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shines here. The group certainly has a grand diversity; I wonder if it is possible -- ("inconceivable!") -- that they could come to an agreement on anything!

### This, That, and All

I recently had the joy of reading a first novel by a new writer. It was a swords and sorcery fantasy, with a fairly high "entropy level," in that all the swordsmen also were sorcerers! If you and I were smacking at each other with swords, we'd also be throwing fire-balls and ice-rams and wind-storm spells at each other. This makes the combat scenes more complicated than they are in most fantasy settings: the combats go on at quite a bit of length, but this isn't irksome, as there is so much more going on.

The chap's story suffered horribly from bad spelling and grammar. He had especial trouble with the dentals: he used "cloth" where it ought to have been "clothe," "breath" where it ought to have been "breathe," and "bath" when it ought to have been "bathe." I had to conclude that he honestly didn't know the difference. Yet in most other ways, his literacy was high, and, in fact, the quality of his writing as literature was worthy of praise.

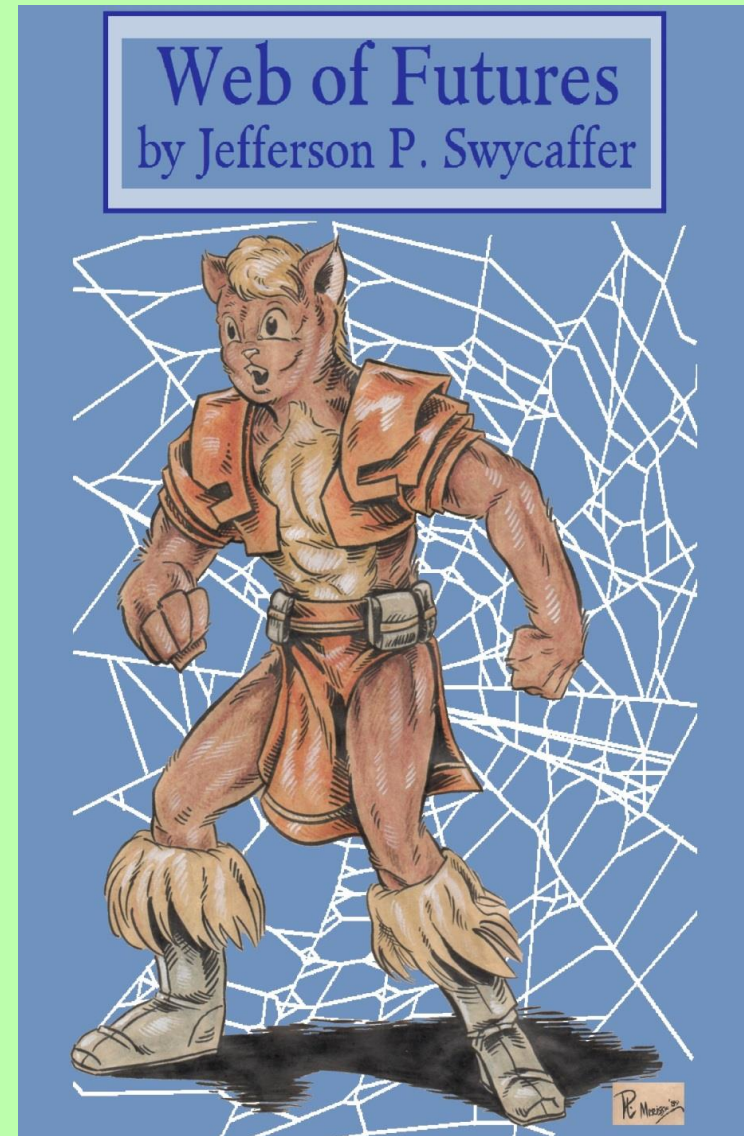
I finished my own most recent novel! This one is called Improve Each Shining Hour, and works from the premise that a character from the 21st century ("today") has gone back to Europe in 1533, and is making judicious changes in history, as he knows it, to prevent some of the worst events of the past. He is too late to prevent the destruction of the Aztecs, but is just in time to save the Incas. Next, he takes steps to prevent the Reformation from blowing up into the hellish series of religious wars which culminated, in our history, in the Thirty Years' War.

Did I mention it's comedy? The agents of change are a pair of Leiber-esque thieves -- scoundrels and knaves and ne-er do well cads -- who go about on their missions and crusades with a total lack of respect, and absolutely no gravitas at all. Imagine sending Laurel and Hardy as ambassadors to Europe, in early 1914, to try to avert World War One!

I'm about to put up my novel "Web of Futures" on Amazon for Kindle. This was professionally published by TSR Books, back in 1992. I was lucky enough to get a lovely piece of art from Phil Morrissey, who gave me permission to use it for the cover.

Self-publishing is being fun, although it's obvious I'll never make a living at it. I did bring in a total of \$11.00 in 2015 -- enough to buy lunch.

Now...I've got to get started on my next book!





### NOTES FROM A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY #3

March 2015

For N'APA 221

Lorien Rivendell

(Lauren Clough)

[Lorienrivendell99@gmail.com](mailto:Lorienrivendell99@gmail.com)



Monster!

#### Kindle Scout

I first learned about Kindle Scout through a sponsored post on Facebook. That book was a “hot” book, apparently meaning a lot of people nominated it, but it ultimately did not get chosen for publication through Kindle Scout. All of the books I voted for did not get published by Kindle Scout, but eventually got published and put up for sale on Amazon through other means (probably self-published, especially the ones that showed up 's day or two after notification). I have them all on my wishlist on Amazon, with notes that I voted for them. Someday, I may purchase them. I have an incredible amount of Kindle books already. If I retire right now and read every minute of every day for the rest of my life, perhaps I'll be able to read them all. If I live to be 120.

My strategy is to nominate books that interest me that are close to expiring. That gives me more nominations and more chances to help a book get published (they limit the number of books I can

nominate at any one time to three). That also gives me more chances at reading a free book if one ever is chosen for publication. (I pretend I'm helping authors get published, but I'm really in it for the free books.)

Then I was notified - on the same day - that two of the books I voted for had, in fact, been chosen for publication. One happens to fall into the SF&F genre. The first is *The Girl Who Heard Demons*, by Janette Rallison. This is a young adult, paranormal, fantasy romance. Okay then. The other is *Saving April*, by Sarah A. Denzil. This one is a psychological thriller.

Now I need to wait for a copy of those books. So far, no word....

### **Busy, Busy, Busy**

I stepped down from being a supervisor so I would have less stress and more free time. I have less stress, but still don't have as much time as I would like. I got out of the reading habit over the past few years, and I still can't seem to get back into it. I'm still reading, of course, but days can go by without reading for fun. That *has* to change.

### **The Death of Chrome?**

As the deadline for this issue approached, I had difficulty accessing N'APA 220. I read it once, on my Chromebook, when it was first sent to me back in January, before all the trouble started. Chrome browser on my Chromebook has been acting funny the past few weeks, opening ads when I click on links rather than going where I want to go. When it *does* go where I want to go, it creates links of certain words. Therefore, I have been avoiding using my Chromebook. Does it have a virus? Can it steal my personal information? Is it creating shadow Facebook accounts in my name?

I can find a lot of help with fixing the Chrome browser problem on a Windows-operated device and some on a MAC, but *nothing* seems to be available to help with a Chromebook. All I can find is that Chromebooks, being mostly web-based, very rarely get malware or viruses. The only thing I can think of that I did was to update when requested. I haven't even downloaded extensions in months, though I suppose one of the extensions could be the culprit. My problems started three updates ago. My Chromebook updated again a few days ago when I started the Chromebook to check on things and to see if I could do anything about it. As of this writing, it still does the link opening thing.

So. Is my problem malware-based? It seems unlikely. But the problem is there and it's not going away on its own. And I've no idea if it is harmful in any way. It certainly is annoying.

On a Windows-op, apparently, I can uninstall and reinstall the browser, and there are a few other steps I can take. I have no such option to uninstall on the Chromebook, Chrome *being* the Chromebook. I do not have the option to install Firefox browser on my Chromebook. That always used to be my favorite browser and what I'll use on my phone and tablet.

I will have to search elsewhere for a solution. As a last resort, I'll go back to Windows sooner than I had planned. Windows has many faults, but it has many, many advantages over Chromebook. I can do stuff offline with Windows, for instance. And I can download stuff. I just don't really want to buy a new laptop right now. (On the other hand, I *could* live without a laptop. I have a perfectly good external keyboard for my tablet, so my tablet is *almost* as good as a laptop.)

Interestingly, even though N'APA 220 is in .pdf format, when I downloaded it to Google Drive, from Chrome browser, it wouldn't open on my phone or tablet. When I switched to Firefox and downloaded, voilà! it opened just fine and I was able to refer to it to write the comments section before the deadline.

And this morning, Chrome browser on my tablet has started making links in the text on some pages. So I think Chrome's days are definitely numbered. And I really liked it, because bookmarks were saved across devices. *Something* has corrupted Chrome. I may never be able to use it again.

I hope I can figure out how to get Firefox to share bookmarks across devices.

## **Reviews (or Ramblings)**

### Movies

*Norm of the North*: The only reason I saw this one was because a couple clients wanted to see it. I'm sure it qualifies as fantasy (hello! talking polar bear!), but it really is geared mostly for kids. It had a few funny moments, but unless you have kids or grandkids or just want to take your neighbor's kids off their parents' hands for the afternoon, it's probably not worth going out of your way to see.

*Barbarella*: This was on Netflix. I never would have known it was there unless someone on Facebook hadn't posted asking if we remembered the first time we saw the movie. I hadn't ever seen it, so I searched for it, found it on Netflix, and watched it. Bad doesn't begin to describe it. Really.

*5th Wave*: I don't know why this wasn't in 3-D. Maybe it was and was no longer available in the theater by the time I got around to seeing it. It was mostly predictable, but okay as movies go.

*Gods of Egypt*: I saw this in 3-D. It wasn't spectacular and was mostly predictable. I didn't think the 3-D really added anything to it.

*Zootopia*: I saw this one with a couple clients. We saw the cheap Early Bird showing in 2-D. I really didn't expect much of this one, but it turned out to be pretty cute. My clients talked about the movie for the rest of the day. "Rabbit cop" pretty much sums it up. But don't forget the unlikely friendship between the rabbit cop and the con artist fox. I foresee a sequel in the future. Perhaps many sequels.

## Comments

Jefferson Swycaffer, Archive Midwinter: Thanks!

As near as I can tell, "clough" is boring old Middle English. However, I've been told by an acquaintance from Ireland that the name is "very Irish." Since St. Patrick's Day is rapidly approaching as I write this, I'll take that.

Our more or less official coat of arms:



Ha ha about your sister's tales of her workplace. I often say the staff are collectively about as smart as a box of rocks. Not myself, of course, just the *rest* of the staff.

It sounds as if the healthcare system is just as delightful there as it is here. As far as moving to Canada, I've heard there may be a mass emigration should a certain potential presidential candidate win the office.

Too bad about the Kindle Scout project. As I wrote in my natter above, it appears to be very difficult to get a contract out of it. I've no clue what criteria they are looking for beyond sheer numbers of votes

*George Phillies, The Murdered Master Mage*: Yes, redoing the story to explain things is helpful. Bad stuff, like almost getting killed, is very good in fiction (and it should stay in fiction, I must hasten to add). I continue to enjoy each installment.

I purchased *Mistress of the Waves* a month or so ago. As noted above, I haven't had much time for reading for pleasure. My goal in the next two months is to read and review this book and one of Jefferson Swycaffer's books. I simply refuse to let work rule my life as much as it did for the past three years.



## THE SILVER (STATE) AGE

an APazine for N'APA 221 by Kevin Trainor, Jr.  
3040 Kishner Drive #205  
Las Vegas, NV 89109  
wombat.soch@gmail.com

### By way of introduction...

Depending on how you want to define one's terms, I've been involved with SF fandom and other facets of geek culture since 1974, when I attended my first convention - Discon II, the Worldcon for that year, which was being held in my backyard. I didn't perpetrate any fanac until I got married to the former Lois Spooner and moved to Minnesota, though; there I became involved with StippleAPA, which was originally a place for apahackers on the waiting list for the (now-defunct) MinneAPA to do their thing and has since outlived its "parent". After raising two children and getting divorced (not necessarily in that order) I volunteered at Arcana, Anime Iowa, Diversicon and Convergence, and eventually became part of the group that founded Anime Detour in Minneapolis.

After moving back to the Washington area, I dropped out of StippleAPA and didn't get involved much in local fandom, though I did go to Balticon a few times and Katsucon once. Eventually the high cost of living and the lack of full-time work provoked me into moving to Las Vegas, where I got involved in N3F through Baen's Bar and am currently hanging out with a couple of the local clubs, SNAFFU and VSFA.

I'm interested in most aspects of geek culture. I started out reading all the SF I could get my hands on in the Washington-area libraries (military and civilian), watched *Star Trek* in re-runs in the summer afternoons, played D&D back in the days when the Little White Box was all there was - and Traveller in the age of the Little Black Books. I've also been a wargamer, though most of my gaming these days is on my computer (hello, *Fallout: New Vegas*!) and at various times have been involved in media fandom and anime fandom. Never been much into costuming or cosplay, but I can appreciate it when done by others.

I suspect those diverse interests are partially why George asked me to volunteer for the recruiting and membership bureau.

Currently reading: Delta Green: Tales From Failed Anatomies, by Dennis Detwiller.

## Comments on N'APA 220

**The Official Organ:** Forgive me for noticing (surely I am not the first) that the APA title looks like something Lovecraft might have filed a story on, if he'd been a sportswriter covering N'ASCAR.

**Archive Midwinter:** I hope the issue with your prescription gets resolved in a non-lethal manner, and soon!

I remember reading some Douglas Reeman ages ago, set in the era between World War II and Korea. I thought it was okay brain candy, not as good as C.S. Forester, but then few things are.

Speaking on behalf of my ancestors, I'm glad your dragon protagonist didn't manage to get in Cortez' way. The Aztecs were bad neighbors, bad people, and deserved what they got, IMNSHO.

**Notes From A Galaxy...:** I look forward to seeing your comments on the new *Star Wars* movie, which I hope to see again in 2-D after suffering through a 3-D showing. Glasses or no glasses, I get a headache from these newfangled kinescopic effects, and wish they would knock it off.

**The Murdered Master Mage:** Well, they *have* to use the winged boars to tow the airships. Surely you remember the disastrous outing of SMLS *Hindenburg*, whose fiery demise came as the result of its tow-dragon's unfortunate backblast?

**...meanwhile, between conventions...**

It took me about thirty years to stumble into the actual family business of accounting\*, and another three to figure out that while some people are meant to be CPAs, I'm not one of them. Man's got to know his limitations, as that detective in the movies was fond of saying. These days, I do taxes for H&R Block here in Vegas, after four years of doing so in Alexandria, Virginia. I enjoy doing peoples' Federal and State returns; it gives me a sense of satisfaction to keep money out of Uncle Sam's grabby hands, to say nothing of the state revenooers, and I also enjoy teaching people about the tax code, which is something most people learn the hard way, if at all. It pays fairly well; after the first year, one gets paid a percentage of the return preparation fee, plus various incentives for getting clients to sign up for various things like the Emerald Card, Peace of Mind protection, and so on. I usually make about as much doing taxes in four months as Social Security pays me all year, which makes for a fairly comfortable living out here.

Like most of you, I'm working on a book, or more properly two books set in the same universe. They're space opera, and not terribly original, but if people find them entertaining, I'll be happy. I have two e-books out on Amazon - both non-fiction. The Last Falangist is a collection of essays on matters personal and public, and What Did You Do In The Cold War, Dad? is an account of my abortive military career with some additional material on military affairs around the time of the Second Gulf War and some military history. I'm hoping to add another non-fiction book on my experience with fandom (spoiler: not always positive) and some more SF if people like the first two books. We'll see how it goes.

I also do book reviews, linkagery, posts about burgers, and other important matters (sic) at The Other McCain, a conservative political website run by R. Stacy McCain\*\* which sometimes reads like a cross between the old *Police Gazette* and *National Review*, if the latter was less Catholic and more Southern. #RollTide! Stacy used to be the society page editor at the *Washington Times* until management there started suffering an infestation of former *Washington Post* staffers, at which time he pulled the pin and started blogging full-time.

\* as opposed to what I *thought* the family business was, i.e. the military.

\*\* Not to be confused with his Crazy Cousin John, the senator from Arizona.

# Robot Octopus vs. Beatniks from Mars #1

For N'APA 221 (if I make the deadline)

Jeff Barnes

1907 Constitution Drive

Fairmont, WV 26554

[jjon31@yahoo.com](mailto:jjon31@yahoo.com)

Greetings! I was a member of N3F way back in the early 1980s, then I kind of drifted away. I rejoined a few years ago but didn't participate, because life was getting in the way (I became my elderly and ailing mother's sole caregiver and eventually had to put her in a nursing home).

So, I have joined yet again, and I am determined to participate this time. This is the first time I have contributed to N'APA, though I have been a member of other apas in the past – back in the days when I had to use a typewriter, then copy, collate and mail my contributions in. I don't think I want to go through that again, so I am happy that this apa is done online!

Anyway, I was hoping to get started on this sooner, but life got in the way again, with my fiancée's mother becoming ill, going into a coma and passing away, so I am actually typing this on March 14<sup>th</sup>, so I will have to make this a quickie.

I have been thinking about fandom lately. When I first became interested in science fiction and fantasy, I was the only fan I knew. Eventually I gained some like-minded pen pals, so correspondence was my substitute for a social life. SF/fantasy fans were definitely on the fringes of society, and it was a lonely time for people such as myself, who lived in small towns, where most people were only interested in drinking beer

and watching sports on television. I was grateful for my pen pals, fanzines, and clubs I was a member of via correspondence. The mailbox was like a lifeline to me.

And now everybody seems to be into some sort of SF or fantasy. Most of the blockbuster movies, it seems, are SF/fantasy or at least have elements of the genre, SF/fantasy books are on the best seller lists regularly and what was once on the periphery of pop culture now seems mainstream. I guess that is good, in a way, but in another way I kind of miss the common bond I shared with other fans, who didn't quite fit into society.

Well, that's probably enough rambling for now, as I want to get this done and get it in to George, so, on to...

## COMMENTS

Jefferson P. Swycaffer: Damn! Your medication situation really sucks! I know something of that, since, as I mentioned, I was my mother's caregiver and Medicare/Humana (or Inhumana, as I call it) would not always cover what she needed. I am sorry that you are experiencing this crap, too.

You have a pen pal? Cool! I used to have tons of them and now I am down to three. I guess e-mail are killing traditional letter writing, and that, to me, is sad.

The novel you are working on sounds cool! Who couldn't love a "radioactive chromium dragon from hell"?

Thank you for sharing the beautiful photo!

Lorien Rivendell: I agree with you about *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. I enjoyed the hell out of it; I got the same feeling I had when watching the original trilogy. I also saw it twice, but my fiancée's brother saw it five or six times!

George Phillies: I have been enjoying "The Girl Who Saved the World." Eclipse is such a great character!



The Murdered Master Mage #4  
for N'APA 221  
George Phillis  
48 Hancock Hill Drive  
Worcester, MA 01609  
phillis@4liberty.net

**Comments: Cover:** As always, Jefferson gives us an excellent cover, for which we should be most grateful.

**Archive Midwinter:** Deep sympathies on your medical issues. If you are stuck short-term, some pharmacies and drug firms have emergency relief programs, though I suspect that these are too slow to be of use. I hope that matters turned out well.

With respect to naval adventure series, the archetype is Horatio Hornblower. When David Weber wrote a Royal Navy in outer space series, he patterned it after Hornblower. At one point, the heroine, a climbing naval officer, is given a present by her parents, namely this three-millenia-old series of fictional novels, "Horatio Hornblower". There was also a series I would have described as Horatio Hornblower as written by Jane Austen, one volume of which being turned into Master and Commander.

**Notes from a Galaxy Far, Far, Away:** I hope that you are happier with your new job description. The change sounds to be very reasonable. I would of course be delighted if you got into more art, because I would truly use more art for TNFF. N'APA could use more covers.

I followed a variation on your theme, namely I got tired of the lack of resources, support, pay increases, etc., realized I was about to turn 68, and retired. The sign on my office door read "Retired. Gone Writing Forever" and that is what I have been doing. At the moment I am part way through a project of writing a short book, to be finished over a month's time, dealing with campaign finance features of one of my political party's Presidential candidates. The destinations of the money turn out to be interesting, broadly speaking. While I am doing this, writing on The Girl Who Saved the World is pretty much on hold.

### **The Girl Who Saved the World**

©2016 George Phillis

However, this is now Chapter Six, so we shall finish it off and return to Chapter 3.

"I am Saigo Shigetoshi, Legate of the Satsuma Daimyo." Buncombe nodded politely at Saigo. Relations between America and their Pacific neighbor had always been friendly, each side recognizing that any other attitude was pointless. The legal fiction that Saigo only represented the Satsuma Daimyo rather than speaking for the Emperor and the Shogun was one of the quaint aspects of doing business with the Japanese. Saigo's seven layers of polychrome kimono, besides being gorgeously colorful, managed to be both warm and comfortable.

"Legate Hong Sangui of Manjukuo." Hong carefully look away from Buncombe. Relations across the Bering Straits had been frigid since the Manjukuoans discovered that their failure to contest the ownership of Alaska had given away huge gold and mineral deposits. Of course, Buncombe

considered, the Empire had been so little interested in Alaska and places beyond that they had retained a Russian to explore them. Hong wore pale yellow court robes, embroidered left and right with a pair of five toed dragons, showing a close tie to the Imperial family. A large scarlet fire sigil sewn on each forearm of the robes indicated his performance on the Imperial Examinations, showing that he had finished in the highest rank. The lower ranks test memorization, Buncombe reminded himself, but the highest ranks were based on puzzle solving. Hong hid a top-notch mind behind his refused shoulder.

"For Peter, Emperor of all the Russias, Princess Elizaveta Romanoff." The oldest daughter of Tsar Peter VI wore classical Russian court dress, complete with a tiara. Romanoff's coat and blouse and trousers were brilliant scarlet spackled with silvery lace and trim. The platinum alloy highlighted her long hair, faded by the decades from raven-black to pure white. At 60, she preserved the figure she had had at 20, a figure that hid her sharp wit and sharper memory. The figure, Buncombe thought, was undoubtedly in fair part a consequence of her wearing at all times a substantial tonnage of silk and precious metals.

"Colonel-General Wilhelm Christian aus und zu Dreikirch, League Secret Political Police." Dreikirch snapped to attention and clicked his heels. Buncombe recognized his dress uniform. The New Hampshire State Guard used the same color scheme, minus the pounds of gold braid and jingling medals, for its winter camouflage uniforms..

"League Elite Persona Brigade, Brigade Leader Valkyria." The tall, blue-eyed woman now wore an ankle-length flame-orange dress rather than her more familiar battle armor. The loose sleeves of the blouse failed to hide her substantial muscles. Unlike many folks in plate mail, Buncombe reminded himself, Valkyria was not stupid, just vigorously rules-oriented. In some ways, rules-oriented could be worse.

"League Chancellor Lars Holmgren."

Where was this meeting going, Buncombe wondered? The Ambassadors had met often enough that most of them, most of the time, did not feel obliged to insult each other. Positions of the Great Powers on ownership of the Namestone were hardly state secrets, at least among the powers that believed that the Namestone existed. The Celestial Republic of Prince Wang was by no means convinced that there actually was a Namestone. After all, if it existed, the Martyr would undoubtedly have given it to the Perfect Man, the Emperor of the Middle Kingdom, Lord of All the Earth, when the Martyr first arrived on Earth three millennia ago, and he had not done so. The IncoAztec Speaker for the First Speaker doubtless agreed with the Celestial Republic's Ambassador, except of course that the Martyr would undoubtedly have given the Namestone to the First Speaker, the Living Sun.

"General aus und zu Dreikirch, is there any progress to report? I know there is also an agenda, but first things first." Holmgren directed his attention to the chief of the League Secret Political Police, who looked even more bedraggled than his audience. He had been awake for almost two days, ever since the universal solar eclipse began.

"We are pursuing every lead," Dreikirch answered, his bushy grey mustache all aflutter. "There has been an extremely thorough search for persona fitting Eclipse's

description. The garb we saw on video is registered with Niederhof's on the Vienna Ringstrasse, but as you know absolutely no one has ever penetrated Niederhof's security arrangements to see the persona behind the garb. Tomorrow their lead window display will be replicas of Eclipse's three garbs -- yes, she has three of them -- and 'Niederhof, supplier of fine garb to the Glorious Bearer of the Holy Namestone' will be their selling point. I infer that the customer paid in gold thalers that were promptly melted down and reminted, so there is no DNA trace.

"Other than that, there is no record whatsoever. My staff agrees that Eclipse is a woman, not too advanced in years, likely late 20s, and rigorously trained. Who is behind her? There must have been a huge support team, but they remain in the shadows. I have no more to report."

"Ah, yes," Holmgren said, "the Agenda. As we are now in Regular Order, there is a Speaking Stone, and an order of speaking. The first issue is the complaint, actually, complaints, about the League Strike Force and its actions on Atlanticea. The speaking order is the order in which I received complaints, followed by standard rules. Several of you have made emphatically clear that you object to treating these issues in closed session, so we are not closed. We begin with traditional short opening remarks and then turn to substantive issues. Ambassador Moeller, I believe you speak first."

Moeller straightened his tie. "The Supreme Warlord of All the Germans is most concerned with the lack of properly aggressive action by the League Elite Persona Brigade. The moment that the Bearer refused to hand over the Namestone, the Bearer should have been summarily executed, without giving her any warning or any further argument. League resolutions, binding on every person in the world, make clear that it is entirely and most strictly forbidden for any private person to retain custody of the Namestone. Equally, League Resolutions, binding on every person in the world, make clear that it is entirely and most strictly forbidden for any private person to dispute the right of the League to take possession of the Holy Namestone for the benefit of all humanity." Buncombe pulled from one of the desk drawers at his side a small glass pyramid and set it on the table in front of him. You won't, he thought, make those claims without a vigorous objection. He was slightly surprised when Featherstonehaugh put a similar pyramid on his section of the desk. "However, the Bearer was not summarily executed. It is therefore the irrefutable opinion of the Supreme Warlord that the leadership of the Elite Brigade should be replaced, the Brigade being given new, competent, and therefore of course necessarily Prussian leadership." Valkyria's face stiffened. Several more pyramids appeared on desks.

"We are further particularly concerned that large numbers of persons around the world watched this Eclipse persona while she defied the entire League and thus the collective wisdom of all mankind. The notion that single individuals are entitled to disobey, no, even to question the directives of their superiors is entirely and most rigorously unacceptable. That position must be categorically rejected by this Executive and by extension by all civilized people. Failure to reject this notion will lead to riots, disorders, strikes, anarchism, and independent thinking, an intolerable state of affairs that must be put down like the mad dog that it is.

"Finally," Moeller said, "the Supreme Warlord of all the Germans notes that League Resolutions make it explicitly

clear that it is the separate and overriding duty of every Great Power to make every effort to arrest and capture the Bearer and obtain for the benefit of the League of Nations the Key to Paradise, the Holy Namestone. Accordingly, the Supreme Warlord has ordered and directed that the German Elite Persona Team is to move immediately to wherever in the world the Bearer is found, there to incapacitate her and take control of the Namestone. There is of course always a hazard in operations of this type that other parties will be slightly injured or that there will be some minor incidental damage to property. Such costs are appropriately born by the country in which the damage takes place, because if that country had acted in an appropriate and rapid manner, the Bearer would have been captured before the German Elite Persona Team could have deployed to the scene to take command of the Namestone for the benefit of all humanity." Additional pyramids appeared on various desks. Moeller handed the Speaking Stone to Lord Smoking Frog.

"I bring you Greetings from the One World, the Six Regions, and the Land of the Obsidian Hummingbird. The First Speaker, the Living Sun, notes that the Bearer did not immediately comply with the direct and explicit orders of Brigade Leader Valkyria. The First Speaker, the Living Sun, is most concerned that Miss Eclipse's depraved behavior will serve as an ill example for the piously faithful and diligently industrious workers and peasants of the One World," Lord Smoking Frog said. "Those people are all wonderful citizens of our Empire, but like all people other than the Living Sun they are at risk of being led astray by malevolent foreign interests. This risk must be eliminated as rapidly and diligently as possible.

"Furthermore, the Assembly of the Tlatoani and the Council of the Realm are united in insisting that in the face of a League Resolution this Eclipse person owed instant obedience to Commandant Valkyria. That is the way it is in all well-ruled countries. Those who lead direct. Those who follow obey without question, hesitation, or thought. When Eclipse was seen not to obey, she set the example that disobedience can ever be a valid option, which of course it is not. At the first moment that she refused to obey, she should have been struck dead. Better, of course, she should have been rendered unconscious, separated from the Namestone, and then she should have been tortured to death. Slowly. Her agony and death would then have sent a clear message on the virtue and correctness of that unthinking obedience that is the true strength of all civilized lands. Therefore, we believe a Special Commission should immediately be appointed to deal with the most important of all questions, choosing for Miss Eclipse the most painful and terrifying possible form of execution, following which her still-beating heart should be offered up to Witchywives.

"Finally, the First Speaker, the Living Sun, is most emphatic that the Namestone must be recovered as soon as possible and used to bring Heaven to Earth. Accordingly, the First Speaker has ordered that the Jaguar Knights be immediately ready to attack the Bearer, no matter where on earth she is found. The Jaguar Knights are well-equipped with teleporters and high power combatants, so there can be no doubt that the Bearer will be overwhelmed by their attack. We are in complete agreement with Supreme German Warlord that while there is a possibility of incidental or collateral damage, that such damage must be recognized as a heroic

sacrifice on the part of those suffering the damage, for which of course they do not need to be compensated. In saying this, we do not deny the privilege of the ruler of any of the Great Powers and the other powers to reward his citizens for any damage they may have suffered while being associated with the heroic act of capturing the Namestone.” Buncombe noted that several of his fellow ambassadors were looking significantly askance at the remarks of the Speaker for the First Speaker. The Speaking Stone was passed to the next ambassador.

Grand Vizier Sulieman Pasha looked around the room. “The Emperor of the Ottomans, Defender of the Faithful, Protector of the Three Holy Places, may his piety and virtue redound to the heavens, has taken note of the failure of the League Strike Team to procure the Namestone. On one hand, it is entirely sad that there was no capture. On the other hand, the Emperor, may his wisdom increase forever, recalls that this body discussed at great length on a regular basis the protocols to be used if someone other than us managed to thread the Maze and recover the Namestone. His Imperial Wisdom believes that the League Strike Team did in fact execute the plan that was applicable. The Leaders of the Corps of Janissaries have advised the Emperor: It is unfortunate that the agreed-upon plan was not successful, but that is the nature of plans. They do not always work. The Emperor therefore does not believe that it would be particularly appropriate at this time to transfer command of the League Strike Team from its current command staff to the Commandery of the Worshipful Hosts of the Pious and Faithful, as the Ambassador of the German Warlord has so wisely suggested. In particular, there might be some confusion arising from the issue that the League Team includes both men and women, the women not serving as camp followers, contrary to any reasonable arrangement within a military force.” Buncombe noted that the women in the room were all striving not to break out into laughter. Fortunately, he considered, they had heard this line before from the usual Ottoman Ambassador. “Also, in all our planning we made no plan that allowed for the possibility that a Lord of Eternity would be present or would seek to intervene in the recovery of the Holy Namestone, so the plans were less than complete.

“Having said that, the Protector of the Three Holy Places has at his beck and call what is undoubtedly the most powerful group of personas in the entire world. There is therefore no need for foreign groups to enter the Lands of Peace in pursuit of the Namestone. Such an entry would provoke unfortunate consequences for the intruders, for which the Defender of the Faithful could not possibly take responsibility.” Buncombe brought to mind several ancient American adages involving the concept of the slow train wreck. It seemed more than a bit likely that several foreign powers would be perfectly happy to have their persona teams invade the territory of other foreign powers with what would be claimed to be the best of intentions, do astonishing amounts of collateral damage to key industrial facilities, and then leave. The net result, he suspected, would not be entirely favorable for world peace or local property values, even before the Bearer started resisting the persona teams trying to capture her.

“Finally, his Wisdom the Emperor notes the great likelihood that this Eclipse person is to be numbered among the ranks of the Faithful, in which case it is appropriate for

Hosts of the Faithful to come to her aid if she is attacked.” The Grand Vizier passed the Speaking Stone to Legate Hong.

“Already the Great Khan, the Emperor of Manjukuo and All Mongolia, from the center of the world to the Polar Sea, has issued the most fundamental of all orders: ‘Men and women of the Horde! To your horses!’ All the personas and all the soldiers of all Manjukuo are immediately ready to advance against the Bearer, no matter where she is found, so soon as she can be located. There is no doubt but that she will be overwhelmed and her stolen artifact recovered for all the people of the world.” Buncombe steeled himself for the bloviations of the remaining ambassadors. The Russians would undoubtedly interpret the German remarks as a threat of war. The French and the Austro-Hungarians would speak of welcoming the Bearer into their midst, and using tactful means to persuade the bearer to use the Namestone as the League requested. It seemed unlikely that either Ferencz or Davout would be able to explain the concept ‘tact’ to many of their fellow ambassadors. Buncombe realized that while he was collecting his thoughts the Speaking Stone had moved several more times, so the Sikh Ambassador was speaking.

“Finally,” Ambassador Singh said, “I have have been asked to bring word from the Tibetan Lamanate. While the Dalai Lama is temporarily absent awaiting reincarnation, the Sera Lama has extended an open invitation to this Miss Eclipse to visit Tibet to meditate with him on the hazard that the Holy Namestone creates for her soul, for surely a device that grants all worldly desires will distract us all from tranquil meditation. Indeed, the Sera Lama counsels us all that we should abandon our interest in the purely worldly temptations offered by the Namestone, in favor of the celestial awards resulting from renouncing all worldly goods.”

The Speaking Stone eventually reached the American Ambassador. “Mind you,” Buncombe said, “I would be remiss in my duties as Ambassador of the American Republic if I did not note that most of our citizens have a complete lack of sympathy with the League’s assertion that it has a claim on the Namestone. The American position for centuries has been that the Namestone would belong to he who took it. I agree that most Americans would also have preferred that Miss Eclipse simply joined the extremely long list of people who bet their lives against the Namestone and lost. We do not wish Miss Eclipse ill for performing her heroic deed, but the Namestone was better left in the Tomb in the hands of the Martyr.” Several of Buncombe’s colleagues glared in his direction. “Of course, it was two Americans who separately entered the Maze and were the only challengers ever to survive, quitting while they were ahead.” Some of Buncombe’s colleagues turned beet red. Four appeared to be struggling to avoid breaking into laughter at his tweaking of the lion’s tail. The English and Germans had lost the core of their navies in a prior attempt. The English “world chess champion” had declined to emulate the challenger he had dodged, when the challenger had visited England to play for the world title, by entering the Maze. “In any event, my Republic’s frugal Congress may well take its own good time about authorizing any part of our very limited incomes to be spent in Eclipse’s pursuit, assuming that our Congress in its wisdom does not decide that she is the proper owner. We are a poor but thrifty nation and have better uses for our meager resources.” Buncombe silently congratulated himself on saying his final few sentences with a straight face. It was hardly a secret that

the American Republic was by a very considerable margin the wealthiest country in the world.

"Finally, America is a sovereign nation. Foreign attacks on our citizens and residents, including in particular attacks on the hypothetical Miss Eclipse if she is an American, would plausibly be acts of war and will be treated as such. We have no intent of sending our armed forces abroad in pursuits of willow-the-wisps. We will, however, consider favorably requests for mutual assistance from countries in the Americas that request our assistance. Furthermore, President Daniel Oliver Webster has indicated that if the Governors-General of any of the Canadian Dominions request emergency aid, then, so long as the Queen-Empress and her Ministers do not object, arrangements might perhaps be made. After all, if your neighbor's house is on fire, you break out the hoses first, and consider your minor historical disagreements with your neighbor after the fire is extinguished." From the looks on various faces, Buncombe had indeed set several foxes loose in neighboring chicken coops. American foreign policy had for centuries been based on total noninvolvement in foreign affairs. Protecting southern neighbors from the IncoAztec Empire was viewed as a domestic matter, given the series of wars that had been fought between America and the Aztecs. And now, Buncombe thought, he had announced a minor change in American foreign policy. Buncombe handed the Speaking Stone to Ambassador Featherstonehaugh.

"Curiously," Featherstonehaugh said, "the position of Queen Victoria, the Third of her Name, and her Ministers is in many respects similar to that of the United States. I realize this circumstance may sound surprising to some. In particular, Her Majesty's government is disenthused with the notion that foreigners are entitled to appear in our country unannounced with the intent of using our lochs and rills to fight a war. Her Majesty and Her Government must categorically and absolutely refuse to be responsible for the consequences if such an event were to occur. While I could go on at greater length, I am in the common position of Final Opening Speaker, namely I believe that we might all find it useful to consult with our governments about your preliminary remarks, some of which were not what official positions would have led us to expect. Naturally, we are all gentlemen and ladies, and do not employ spies," the room burst into giggles, "so none of us have any non-official knowledge before the meeting of what was about to be said. If any of you are curious, my actual prepared introductory remarks are in the meeting packet. I will be happy to meet privately with any of you who have questions on it. I therefore propose a pleasant recess."

"Does anyone else want to be heard on this matter?" Holmgren asked.

"Manjukuo pledges one hundred tons of gold to the persons who locate and catch her, and gain for us the Namestone," Manjukuoan Legate Hong Sangu interrupted. Holmgren smiled and applauded. His audience might need a little while to realize that this interruption was pre-rehearsed.

"In that case," Holmgren continued, "I propose that we recess until after dinner, so that we may receive instructions. I see several objection pyramids on the table. Those might perhaps be the first order of business this evening. Is there objection to a recess? Hearing none, we are recessed." Holmgren wished he had not seen Buncombe and Featherstonehaugh exchange knowing glances. What might that unlikely duo be planning? A lack of world peace would be

an incredible disaster, and that lack might appear rather quickly. This meeting had gone no farther than preliminary remarks, and already the latent hostilities between the Great Powers were coming to the surface.

### Chapter Three

#### The Hidden Fortress

Morning

January 12, 2018

The Healing Matrix had promised: I would wake before sunrise. Indeed, here it was, not yet seven in the morning, the sky still dark, and I was awake. I still hurt a lot. I was also ravenously hungry. The Healing Matrix had done more in two days than normal healing would do in two weeks, but it demanded calories. You can call on gifts instead of eating, if you have the right gifts, but that's not a good idea at my age. Mum was emphatic about that, not that I wouldn't want her cooking. Not eating is an especially bad idea if you are doing high-intensity healing, which I am. You really want solid food to replace all the chemical bits and pieces you are consuming.

My bedroom's full-length mirrors confirmed that my cuts and abrasions were gone, as though they had never been. The Namestone had cleared up my face for the video, but the rest of me was healing more naturally. The mirrors also showed I was looking a bit thinner than I usually do. I am girlishly slim. I still weigh more than people think... muscle does that... but I don't have that many pounds that I can afford to lose. Getting rid of possible scars thanks to high-grade healing is still good. Yes, there are guys who think a few strategically placed scars make them attractive to women. I am not a guy, thank you. And I am very much not convinced that scars, not to mention irregular shaving and under-bathing, make guys attractive.

I dutifully spent fifteen minutes doing appropriate stretches and bends under the healing matrix's guidance. The deep bruises would take a while to heal. Exercise, however painful, speeds the process. I had my mind control ramped well up so I did not exactly feel the pain, but there was surely a lot of it. At the end, I very much enjoyed a long, hot shower.

The time to start wearing my boy clothing had arrived. Most people see what they expect to see. I dressed as a boy, in boys' cotton corduroys, properly lined and not at all tight, not girls' blue jeans. Actually, I like the long-sleeve loose hunting shirts. They are heavy cotton jaquard weaves, warm, all with pretty polychrome patterns. They have nice big pockets, not to mention elbow patches. The trousers are more comfortable, too. Moose-skin slippers. Hair combed with a part. Cue the slight crackle in my voice. Anyone who met me would see and hear a boy. I might not be able to do that in a few years, but I can do it now.

Today I was going to start dyeing my hair again. By now there were probably ten million personas, not to mention most of the world's billion people, all looking for me. Almost none of them qualified as threats, but I want peace and quiet, not a shootout every time I stop at a grocery store. Disguise is how I make that happen. Notwithstanding Twain's famous story, almost no one will look at a girl and think 'this could be a boy in disguise', let alone the other way around. And no one would look at the dowdy old woman wearing a veil and think they were looking at me. This morning I could go outside wearing a woven cap and no one would be around to notice the difference.