

N'APA
238

January 2019

The Official Organ

#238

Next deadline: March 15, 2019

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

The official preparer is Jefferson P. Swycaffer - abontides@gmail.com

Procedure Change: Please Read:

George Phillies will still be collating and mailing, but submissions should be sent to the preparer, Jefferson Swycaffer. No harm is done if submissions get sent to George, but the process should be to send them to Jefferson.

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; 508 754 1859; and on facebook. To join this APA, contact George.

We occasionally send a copy of N'APA to the accessible (email address needed) N3F membership, in the hope that some of you will join N'APA. Please join now!

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 and the preparer has a full-time job. Publication is always totally regular, though some readers question my interpretations of "is", "always", "totally", and "regular". N'APA has been in existence since 1959, but has transitioned from being a paper APA to an electronic one.

In this issue:

Front Cover: In the Silence of the Night - Jose Sanchez

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Notes from a Galaxy Far, Far Away, by Lorien Rivendell – 4 pages

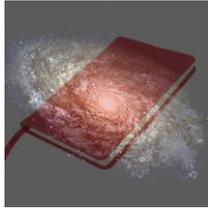
Ye Murthered Master Mage, by George Phillies – 5 pages

Archive Midwinter, by Jefferson P. Swycaffer - 3 pages

Kevin Trainor is on a leave of absence, but hopes to return.

Super thanks to Jose Sanchez, who sent four works of art for use as covers, some really spiffing material!

NOTES FROM A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY #17



January 2019

For N'APA 238

Lorien Rivendell

(Lauren Clough)

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BOSKONE 56

I am planning to attend Boskone (February 15-17, 2019) for the first time in 20-something years. I'm pretty excited. Is anyone else planning to attend? If so, we'll have to look for each other.

REVIEWS AND RANTS

TV/streaming

“Castle Rock” on Hulu: I was originally interested in this show because it was filmed in Orange, MA, about 20 minutes away from me, then I got hooked. It's a rather strange series, and it ended even more oddly. A lot of people were put off by the season finale, and I hope it's not a spoiler to say that nothing was really wrapped up. This is supposed to be an anthology series, and each season is supposed to be self-contained. There's really no place for this to go but get even weirder. At any rate, Season 2 is reported to start filming in March.

“The Handmaid's Tale” on Hulu: This is a bleak near-future series based on the 1985 novel of the same name by Margaret Atwood. The premise of the series is part of the United States fell and the Republic of Gilead has risen to take its place. Most of the privileged people are infertile. Handmaids, women who were chosen because they had

been immoral in the days before Gilead and because they have been proven to be fertile at least once, are forced to mate with the privileged men every month in ceremonies. It's all in the name of the Bible, albeit a twisted interpretation of the Bible. The first season pretty much followed the novel. I like that the series follows more characters than the one handmaid of the novel. I haven't heard officially when Season 3 will start, but I'm hoping it will be in April.

"Santa Clarita Diet" on Netflix: I binge watched most of both seasons in a day. It's one of the funniest shows out there today. Drew Barrymore plays a suburban housewife who somehow turned into a zombie and must eat people to survive. Her family has mastered the art of coverup. I have read that this series has been renewed for a third season, but I don't know yet when it is due to return.

COMMENTS ON N'APA #235, 236, 237

I'm consolidating my responses to all the above past issues. I think this catches me up. Until next time.

Jefferson Swycaffer, Archive Midwinter - I hope by now you have found a suitable job.

I'm finding the Instant Pot is convenient in the sense that I can set it up and forget about it for a while. However, it's really not a time saver, especially since it takes so long to get up to pressure. It's not something to use when I'm in a hurry. I also don't see the point in cooking eggs in it when cooking eggs in an electric frying pan is much faster.

Your "bone of contention" conjures up an amusing image, though probably not so much for the person who donated the femur.

I read more thrillers than any other genre, though I enjoy a wide variety of genres. I used to read a lot of horror, but these days, I prefer my horror in movie form. I'm more into movies than books these days. I don't think that's necessarily bad (or good), but at least with movies, I can multitask if I'm streaming them, though I do tend to miss a lot that way.

Kevin Trainor, Jr., The Silver State Age - I hope by now you have a new dwelling place. I'm sorry school didn't work out for you at this time. It seems things just keep piling up for you. I hope by now, things are starting to look up for you.

I tend to spend way more time than I should on Facebook. I get way behind on the N3F publications (and everything else).

Is Word Perfect still around? I never hear about it these days. Microsoft Word seems to have taken over the world, but I simply refuse to pay for it, so I'm "stuck" with the free word processing program, Google Docs. (Yeah, I know, Open Office also works.)

George Phillies, Ye Murthered Master Mage - Wow! You have a lot of writing projects going on at once!

I suppose a certain amount of complaints goes with the territory. Nobody is happy all the time, or at least nobody I know (though some people are less happy than others). I can't think of any ways to improve things in N3F (assuming anything is actually broken; I mean, it mostly seems pretty okay).

Hurray for a new N'APA collator! I'm not really understanding what the difference between a collator and whatever other roll there is for putting this zine together and getting it out. It sounds like a sharing of the workload, though. At any rate, this electronic version of N'APA is very different (and very similar) to the zine back in the 1990's. I forget what we called the roll of the person who collected all the zines, but each of us writers had to print a certain number of copies of our own zines, then mail all the copies, along with enough stamps to cover the cost of getting the entire issue of N'APA back to us, to the official collator person. We had to plan ahead and get our own parts written, copied, and mailed well before the deadline to ensure they would be included in the intended issue.

Congrats on being named a fellow of NESFA! You don't happen to be attending Boskone this year, do you?

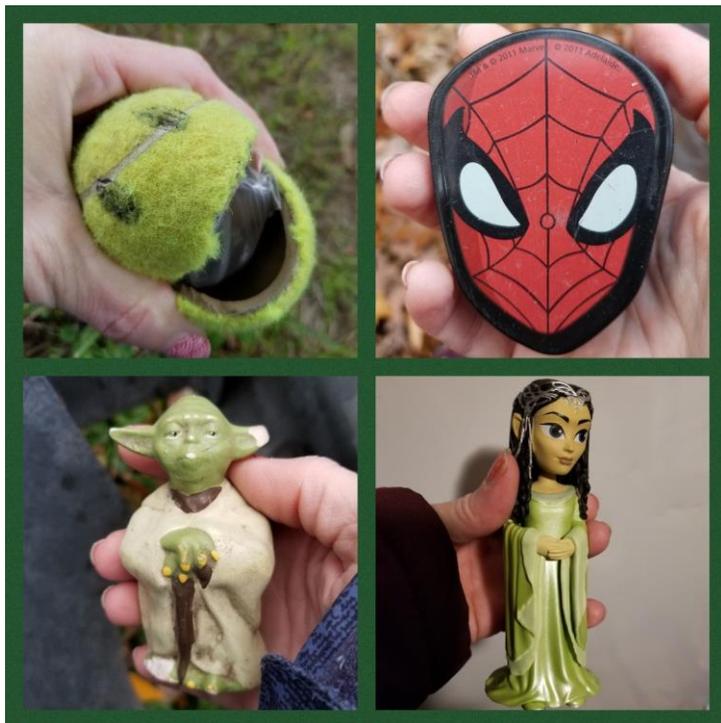
Will Mayo, The Contents of a Good Life - I've managed to figure out how to keep all my copies of N'APA (and lots of other things) in the cloud, rather than on my laptop. This came from the days when I had a Chromebook, which is cloud based, and continuing to keep stuff in Google Drive helps keep my laptop clutter-free. I now have the problem of finding stuff in Google Drive, and I don't always remember what I have called things when I put them there. I do go through once in a while and rename things or move things to folder or - gasp! - delete things.

John Thiel, Synergy 13 - When I was a member of N3F in the Time Before (1990-something), club publications were frequently late to non-existent. Now, we have more publications and they seem to be coming rather frequently, maybe even regularly (I don't really pay all that close attention to when they arrive). I do think some things have

improved over the years. There's always room for improvement, though. I'm at a loss as to what could improve this club.

I just looked up "Amazing Stories." I thought it had been around for years, and I found I had thought correctly. I see that I can read the articles online (or at least some of them), which works for me for now.

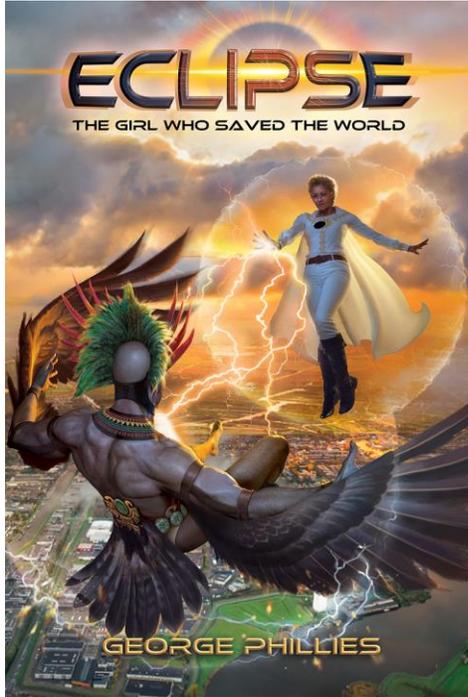
I like the creative opportunity that N'APA affords me. I like being able to discuss whatever I want within my own zine. I can write about N3F or fandom in general - or I can write about other things that interest me (and that I think may interest others).



3 cool containers I found geocaching, plus my new geocaching buddy (lower right).

Ye Murdered Master Mage 238
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Eclipse-the Girl Who Saved the World is now out in paperback at Amazon. The ebook is in order at Smashwords.com and Amazon.com.



ebook pre-order \$3.99; paperback now \$15.99
<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/914837>
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1730762158>

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And I've started writing the next book. It's a rewrite of my old novel This Shining Sea, so it may be out this year. The opening bit follows my comments on the last issue.

Issue Comments, N'APA 237

Alas, there was not much on which to comment.

Front Cover: I was not quite sure how people would take it, but in fact no one was at all bothered by the young lady on the cover of the last issue. After all, she was perfectly decently dressed.

Notes: How did National Novel Writing Month go? A novel in a month sounds to be an incredibly demanding objective. I'd have to write 6,000 words or more every single day, which I think is beyond my limits. In preparing Against Three

Lands, I once did 9,000 words in a day using voice to text, but I only did that once, and over the length of the novel I was actually happy to average 1500 words a day. However, I am a bit older, and perhaps less diligent in my work.

Fans being disinvited to conventions is about modern domestic politics. A group of people dislike someone else's political positions and demand that he she it they be disinvited as a panelist.

Archive Midwinter: Jefferson, I did not know you were into board wargames. I collect them much more than I play them. Sea Stories? Weber's Honor Harrington series started as Horatio Hornblower in outer space, and improved from there.

Airy Castles All Ablaze George Phillies Volume 2 of the This Shining Sea trilogy

Eclipse...

The World's Greatest Tween Superhero
or
The World's Most Terrifying Tween Supervillain

She saved the world from eternal slavery
or
She stole and destroyed the Gate to Heaven, the World's most valuable artifact.

She's fondest of her ponies and cats
or
She slaughtered without mercy thousands of people.

She brought the American Republic out of millennia of isolationism
or
She caused several intercontinental wars.

She shielded her good friend
or
She killed her closest friend.

Now she and her superpowered friends are loose on our Earth

and megaviolence is sure to follow.

Comet dropped feet-first through the thin air, arms above her head, her flight field the only limit on her descent. She landed on the balls of her feet, knees flexing slightly, the red sands of Mars crunching under her boots.

“We’re here,” she announced. “Welcome to the Red Planet.” Her three companions landed with her, twin siblings Star and Aurora to the front and Eclipse very close behind her shoulder. She shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts. She was still shaking from her confrontation with her parents, not fifteen minutes ago. “We’re off to save the world, and this is our first stop.”

<Comet, why are you talking?> Aurora asked. <Every other time we’ve been here, we just let me use telepathy.>

“I was curious,” Comet said. “There’s a little air. Can you hear me?” That was a lie, she admitted to herself, but it was a totally solid excuse for not letting Aurora into her mind. Her dear sister was barely twelve, and almost until the end had been completely oblivious to the tension between her older sister and her parents. Then it had been too late. Now was not the time to have Aurora decide it was her fault she’d missed the clues.

<Sort of, Comet,> her year-younger brother answered mentally, his twin sister’s telepathy carrying his thoughts to the four of them. <Except your voice sounds strange. Soft and low-pitched.>

<We don’t seem to have company,> Eclipse announced as she finished a pivot, delicately balancing on one toe, her scan covering the distant horizon. <In a few moments our host will give us breathable air. But stay ready for vacuum.>

<Now that it’s too late,> Star said, <did everyone grab their duffel bag?>

<We’re good,> twin sister Aurora confirmed. <Dad and Mom only checked what we were packing three times.> She paused, suddenly embarrassed. <They checked yours and mine, I mean, Star.> Her twin brother nodded.

<Dad told me I should for once try not to embarrass his family by forgetting too many things,> Comet said. <And that was before, before I said ‘Heinlein’.> She shuddered, clenching her fists, trying to tell herself she had not made a terrible, irreversible mistake. The Heinlein Divorce Act had let her sever her ties to her family, but there were no take-backs. They were gone forever. She even had to choose a new family name for herself.

<Comet?> The voice in Comet’s head was Eclipse, carefully shielding her thoughts from Star and Aurora. <We need to talk. Now. Could you please crank up your superspeed, just the two of us?>

<Sure!> Comet hesitated. <No! When we did this before, back at home –it was home then – we did telepathy at superspeed. I could feel how much it hurt you.>

<It hurt. It wasn’t hurting me, not frying my brain or anything. It just needed a lot of power.>

Eclipse hoped she could reassure the older girl. <It’s real important. Please?> Eclipse watched as the world beyond the two of them slowed to a stop. Aurora had been turning to face her brother. She was now all but motionless.

“Here we are,” Comet said. “A hundred-to-one speed-up.”

<Comet, I have your back. 100%. It ends up well,> Eclipse promised.

<How can it? And I can’t take back, what I did. Heinlein divorce you can’t take back.> Comet clenched her fists again.

<I have a couple memories for you. Please don’t let anyone else see them. They might help people find me.> Eclipse felt Comet nod assent. She let Comet see images. A big house, someplace in the woods, her big, sunny bedroom with several rows of Captain Infinity Atomic Soakers on one wall, long-course swimming pool, Eclipse stir-frying chicken and vegetables, the Manjukoan sauce simmering in a separate pan. Comet was sure; just outside the sounds she could hear, Eclipse and Mom were having a conversation in...that had to be High Goetic, didn’t it?

There was a break in the memories, then a swirl of light. That was Eclipse, teleporting, less than a half-year ago. She appeared a few feet off the ground, at what should have been one end of the swimming pool. The pool was gone. A trio of large walnut trees rose where the house had been. What? had been Eclipse’s startled thought. Her forcefields slammed to high power. She had to be in the right place. The trees across the lane were exactly the same. What was going on? Right where her bedroom had been, a tree stump pointed skyward, a small cherry-red box sitting on its top.

Very briefly, Eclipse summoned ultravision. She saw that this was not an invisibility trick, some puzzle from her mom. The ground was undisturbed, with no sign of buried chambers or basement walls. In fact, the street utility pipe

carrying power and datanet lines was seamless, missing the T-link leading to the house. Eclipse, Comet remembered, occasionally complained that ultravision was unpleasant to use. Eclipse was understating. If she'd felt that much pain, Comet realized, she'd have dropped half-stunned to her knees.

Memories flashed forward. Eclipse had opened the box. Inside were two U-Pak-It keys, a U-Pak-It receipt, and a note in her mother's crisp notehand.

Eclipse:

You are not being punished. However, you are now on your own. Don't bother trying to find me. Good-bye.

Mom

Eclipse's sharply active mind crashed to a stop. The message was totally unexpected. It was now late afternoon. When she'd left in the morning, everything had been perfectly normal. Not quite in shock, she'd walked back and forth across the property looking vacantly for further clues. None were to be had.

Memories flashed forward: A new house, with huge den and study, a wall of bookcases, a big computer screen next to plenty of writing surface. A big bedroom with Atomic Soakers lining one wall. A windowless room with weight machines, a sweat-soaked Eclipse doing bench presses. Eclipse riding a horse bareback, knees clamped around its sides, feet nudging the horse toward a gallop, laughing in delight as *Snapdragon* took a jump over a fence.

<You see,> Eclipse said, <for me it started pretty awful, but it ended up fine. And I was alone. You have folks at your back. Me. Professor Lafayette. You start out with money. I didn't. You'll be fine, no matter how rough it was a few minutes ago.>

<Your parents dumped you? No warning at all. That's terrible. I can't imagine it! You couldn't ask for help?> Comet stared at her slightly-shorter friend.

<Real, real bad idea.> Eclipse shook her head.

Comet pivoted and hugged Eclipse. *<But I don't even know how to open a bank account, let alone buy a house. How...>*

<Scripting. Rules Engines. I'll give you them later. It's a solved problem, You'll be fine.>

Eclipse hugged Comet back, projecting firm reassurance. *<There are things to worry about. This isn't one of them. I promise.>*

Comet looked at the ground, swallowed, and took a deep breath. *<OK. I'll be all right in a bit. Let's not keep out host waiting.>* Eclipse survived that, she thought. I can pass my vale of tears. She released superspeed.

"Are you two ready?" Comet forced a smile as she looked at her brother and sister.

"Sure," Star said. "What was that between you two?"

"Nothing," Comet said. "Me getting the pep talk I needed." She looked over her shoulder at Eclipse, nodded, and now had a genuine smile on her face. How, Comet wondered, had Eclipse even survived what her parents had done to her. Most kids her age – Eclipse had to be twelve or so, didn't she? – would have rolled up and died. But here was Eclipse, bright and cheerful, helping her friends, when she should have been moping in a corner, too depressed to move.

Aurora looked skyward. *<That was the Wizard of Mars. He says the three of us should come in and get the StarCompass. Since Eclipse won't talk to him, she should wait out here and guard our luggage.>*

Eclipse looked carefully at her three companions. She wouldn't put it past the Wizard to try substituting illusions for her companions, but the Wizard's illusions were supposedly not that carefully made. Star and Aurora had the same cut to their garb, with loose trousers tucked into short boots, long-sleeve pullover tops, and light jackets with broad sleeves tapered at the wrists. The long capes appeared to be affectations, at least if you ignored their supply of pockets. Star's garb was great sky blue, the seven-pointed star of his name covering half of his chest, with seven arrows radiating out in all directions. Auroras garb was black with silver trim, the sigil on her chest being the pyramid, lidless eye, and radiants seen on old-style currency.

Comet? Eclipse realized she had been too distracted to think about Comet's new garb. Comet's old garb had been cut much like Star's. Her new garb was a tight-fitting kelly-green body suit that left absolutely no doubt that she was vigorously physically fit. The comet of her name was gold, starting almost at her throat, its tails wrapping around her torso and legs. From the way

she moved, the suit had to be one of the modern stretch fabrics that didn't restrict movement.

Several lines of thought came together in Eclipse's mind. Something that revealing was surely not what a proper Cantabridgian girl wore. The design must have annoyed Comet's parents no end. Perhaps that had been the garment's purpose.

OK, Eclipse thought, with some luck I can spot a fake when the Wizard fails to copy the designs perfectly.

<Time to go in,> Aurora said, gesturing up the vast staircase at the gates. The Scarlet Castle, she thought, was originally the largest volcano in the solar system. The Wizard of Mars had sculpted it into a dwelling, a palace so large that in a single lifetime you could only see a small fragment of its endless halls. They'd landed on a plaza, halfway up its side, two dozen wide stairs taking them to the front door. Of course, she considered, the stairs were a good mile wide, but they narrowed rapidly toward the five hundred foot width of the Great Gates. This was not quite the moment to wonder what the point of it all was; the Castle seemed more than was needed for its purpose.

The Gates shimmered and vanished. The three walked forward, footsteps echoing dully in the near-vacuum of the Martian atmosphere.

<It's the simple entrance,> Star said, *<even if there's that weird twist on the stairs where we drop back in time and walk through ourselves.>*

"An exceedingly simple manipulation of time, space, and natural law," the Wizard of Mars announced. "Someday your older sister will be able to duplicate it for you. If she lives through this unfortunate event. But this time it's the straight staircase."

The receiving room was lined with pale blue stone. The Wizard sat behind a simple round table. He gestured for the three siblings to sit. "Greetings. Brian Wells. Jane Caroline Wells. Jessamine Trishaset Wells. That's the StarCompass." To Star's eyes, the starcompass looked like a three-dimensional astrolabe. He'd made one of those for the MIT History Museum, but his had just been flat plates. This one was a sphere, plates sticking in all directions, odd eccentric gears, whose shape somehow shifted when he leaned sideways.. Gold, Star thought, that looks to be solid gold, and incredible detailing on the engravings. Comet shook her head vigorously.

"You doubt my claim?" the Wizard asked.

No! No! It's wonderful. It's lovely." For a moment Comet smiled. "It's quadrudimensional, isn't it? I've never seen anything quadrudimensional before, just read about it. No, my 'no' is that I am not Jessamine Trishaset Wells. Heinlein Divorce means I need a new last name."

"Ah. Of course." The Wizard nodded. "And now, instead of searching for a new last name, you will set sail across the cosmos, crossing it twice in the span of a single day. You will be as great a navigator as Admiral Anson, the Hero of the Republic, who set sail from Marblehead, circled the world in his cockleshell sailing ship, and returned. You've heard of Anson?"

"I read his diaries. He was brave." She stared at the Wizard. "You've solved my problem for me. Without me asking."

"Pick the StarCompass up! The chain and wrist clasp are a lanyard. It wouldn't do to drop it in midflight." The Wizard waited. "When you picked it up, you learned how to use it. It's a simple third-order trick. And now my four volunteers are prepared for their journal, across the universe to the Tunnels, and back to Earth, and the same trip when you defeat the menaces. Unless you die first. The StarCompass serves for passage for all of you."

Trisha shook her head again. "They're volunteers. I'm doing this because people paid me. A lot. I'm a mercenary."

"And if Speaker Ming had refused?" The Wizard sounded genuinely curious.

Comet's backbone was ramrod straight. "I would have reminded him of the collapse of the Third Republic, when no compromise was possible, and both sides knew that yielding was political suicide. Did he want the Fourth Republic to join the Third? And did he think I wouldn't go to the press?"

"I see," the Wizard said.

"But I was positive he's a good man, and would give me what I wanted," Comet said.

"And you were right. And you knew I already knew all this," the Wizard answered.

"I'm sure you had a reason for this back and forth," she answered politely.

"Which you will learn in due time. However, it is time for the four of you to be on your way." He stood and pointed at the stairs.

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"How'd it go, guys?" Eclipse said. It was strange to talk on Mars, but you could do it. Her mentalic screens were at high power until she was

sure she was actually speaking to the three Wells siblings.

"This is the StarCompass." Comet held it up so Eclipse could examine it.

"Frigid!" Eclipse said enthusiastically.

"Quadrudimensional. Like the sky octopus. Except the octopus is weirder, somehow. Do you mind if I do an ultravision scan?"

"No. Why should I?" Comet asked.

Eclipse did the scan, not mentioning to her friends that she'd included them in her field of view. She hadn't spotted anything wrong with their garb, and she didn't see anything wrong with them. They were the real Wells siblings, not some Wizard trick.

*<Did you guys learn anything new from the Wizard?>* Eclipse continued.

*<It was kind of weird,>* Brian answered.

*<All he did was give Comet the Starcompass, which only she can use. No,. for some reason I know that you can use it Eclipse, if you have to. How do I know that?>*

*<Wizard put facts in your mind,>* Aurora said. *<He tried that on me, too, except I think he failed.>*

*<Me? Fly across the universe?>* Eclipse asked. *<Now that's a real desperation move.>*

*< And he kept not knowing thngs about me,>* Comet added, *< like my Heinlein divorce and my deal with Speaker Ming.>*

*<When...?>* Aurora asked. The three siblings exchanged memories, lightning fast. *<Strange,>* Aurora continued. *<We had three different conversations with the Wizard, like we split into three timelines and then merged back together again. I talked chess with him. Brian tried to get clues about the menaces. Comet learned about the StarCompass. And each of us thought we had the only conversation.>*

*<Let's get the show on the road,>* Comet announced. *<Eclipse, this time, please let me do the climb to orbit. I want to feel the load on my flight field while we're still close to the ground.>*

Eclipse nodded agreement. *<OK, I've got my flight field up, enough to keep us together if anything goes wrong. Not that it will with you, Comet.>* She smiled at the older girl.

*<Belt and suspenders are good. Does everyone have their luggage? Off we go.>* The four of them soared skyward, their acceleration increasing with every instant. *<This part takes a bit. I need like 500 miles per second for galactic*

*escape velocity plus a safety margin. Figure fourteen minutes and we go faster than light.>*

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<Comet,> her younger brother asked, *<would it distract you too much if we three talked?>*

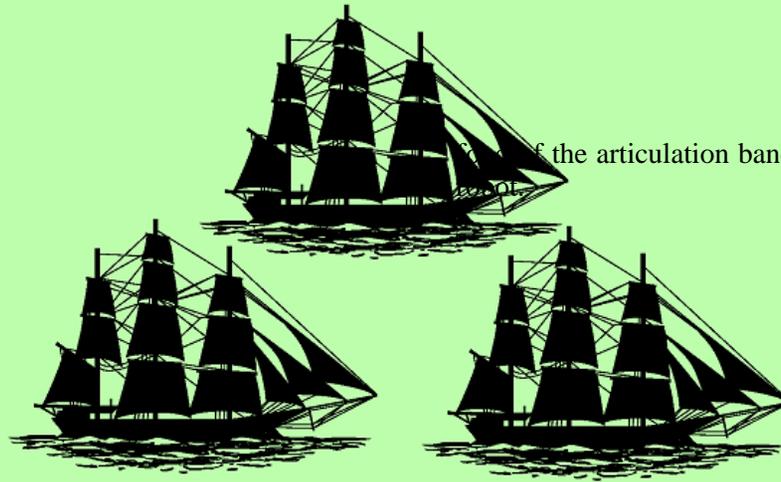
<That's fine,> she answered, *<it'll keep me awake.>*

Archive Midwinter
a zine for N'APA 238

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21 Nov 2018



of the articulation bands on the fingers. This is a very alluring

Oops Again

George asked me to help out, pre-collating N'APA, and I gladly took on the job of "Preparer," only to mess it up, kinda. Well, so it goes. A journey of a thousand miles begins by tripping over the threshold.

Comments:

Jose Sanchez: Cover: George wasn't quite sure whether or not this was too risqué for our membership, and I guess maybe it's on the borderline, but, doggone, I love the "Sexy Robot" trope, and I think this is a really peachy example of the genre. (I fell in love with Hajime Sorayama's "Sexy Robot" paintings at an early age. I have also been a big beneficiary of the art-form, having had a luscious Sexy Robot cover painting by Jeff Easley for my novel Warsprite. In an example of pure egoism, I'll re-print the cover here.) But this is a comment on your picture, so I'll say -- yay! I do quite like it! It's sexy, but in a kind of "bath/boudoir" sort of way, as the dear lady is engaged in necessary health/hygiene of the sort people don't usually do when anyone is watching. It gives a kind of innocence to the naughtiness. I especially like the surface-grid effect on her skin, which has a kind of "circuit-diagram" feel to it, and I also am very



Lorien Rivendell: re National Novel Writing Month, how'd you do? For me, every month is "novel writing month," but it takes me about nine months to complete one. My latest is going very painfully slowly, and I'm not really happy with the results so far. So it goes!

re Stranger in a Strange Land, I was too young, when I read it, to understand it properly. Maybe I should go back and try again. I've heard very mixed opinions about it, from "genius" to "trash." As always, the truth is probably somewhere in between!

George Phillis: "Far more American tourists die of coconuts than of terrorism." I'm willing to believe it, but is that a fact? Certainly we kill each other in vastly greater numbers in traffic than in shootings, but, of course, straight-across comparisons are meaningless. Not many coconuts intend killing anyone, to be sure! (Also, they're high in fats and cholesterol and stuff, and so aren't any too healthy to eat, either. Bummer, 'cause I love 'em!)

I'm not totally sure that Eclipse is a better title than The Girl Who Saved the World, but it is not a bad title by any means. It's just not very descriptive, and feels vaguely "generic." It would be a really good title for an Arthur C. Clarke "nuts and bolts" space science fiction novel.

"Second greatest Elizabethan playwright, William Shakespeare." Aw c'mon! You can't just leave a line like that hanging! Who's the first? (I'm fond of Beaumont and Fletcher, but you sort of have to take them as a pair, and can't single either one out for sole plaudits. Kyd? Hm... No... Marlowe? Well, Marlowe certainly thought so, but does he really stand out? My feeling is he doesn't...)

" . . . brave honorable warriors as tin-plated idiots who are routinely slaughtered by competent soldiers." True, alas. I won't call

them "idiots," but warriors are, and have been since the dawn of civilization, actually quite poor at making war. Also, and again, alas, "honor" is essentially a systematic code of personal disadvantage, and accepting an unnecessary disadvantage in war is, if not idiotic, at least tragically counter-productive. The guy who says "I won't attack the enemy while they are crossing the river, for that would be dishonorable" can't complain when he loses the open-field battle that follows. He has no one to blame but himself and his misguided "honor."

(By the way, when a Klingon says "Honor" he actually means "Renown," not quite the same thing.)

As much fun as the protagonist's musings were -- and they were jolly great fun, allowing you to engage in Heinlein-esque opinions to the vast interest and amusement of the reader -- the jump to a battle scene was a very nice contrast, a change-up of the sort that keeps the book interesting. This kind of variability has shone throughout this book, from conference-room meetings to jam-packed superhero battles. Our hero is pretty much above the level of the three punks, and is hitting a bit below equal weight, but, on the other hand, the stinkers deserved what they got!

I don't feel good about the extra "s" in Sunssword. It just looks wrong to me, and catches my eye badly.

Excellent question: in a world with superheroes and super-powered battles, why are there cities left? (I suppose one could ask the same question about nuclear weapons...)

re an infinite number of alternate worlds, see if you can track down Jack Vance's story "Rumfuddle," where the protagonist not only takes on the issue of infinity, but actually triumphs over it. It is a brilliant rebuttal (so to speak) of Larry Niven's "All the Myriad Ways."

(I stuck my oar into the issue with my story "The Ultimate Anthropic Principle," published in Weird Tales. Infinity isn't as daunting as one might think, once you realize that it appears in both the numerator and the divisor of the key fractions.)

John Thiel: I apologize for fumbling and leaving "Synergy" out of the collection. I'll do better next time.

I think there is significant wisdom in your opening essay: why be a SF fan? Why enjoy anything? If it does, in fact, bring enjoyment, then it has already gone a long way to justifying its existence! SF, as the "literature of ideas," has the additional justification of making readers think (or at least seeking to.) It shares this quality with mystery fiction: both reward careful and thoughtful reading, and an open mind is an asset in the appreciation of both.

re George Phillies re Eldritch Science, I really should submit more there. I've been a tad lax in that. My writing seems to be getting slower and slower these years. I liked the way you put it: "I get up at seven and by the time I dress, freshen up and finish breakfast it's getting near noon." Horrifyingly true, and this is why I haven't sent more to E.S. I'll try to do better!

re pajamas, no worries, I sleep nakies. But shoes, yeah, shoes are a problem. I used to go to Payless (hmpf: fibbers! You do, indeed, have to pay!) but they're closing bunches of their stores and are getting hard to find now. Boogers. I like "walking shoes" that look just enough like formal business shoes to be worn in the workplace, but which are much more comfy than regular "leather" shoes. (Those buggers always end up hurting my Achilles tendon. Very painful!)

Will S. Mayo: as with John, I apologize for leaving out your zine.

That's a VERY nice picture of a tombstone angel!

" . . . nations will lose their political hold as individuals begin to know one another, both near and far, better. It is only a matter of time before communities become both smaller and bigger in ways that had never before been thought possible . . . " Much depends on technology. The Internet has already gone a long, long way toward making those visions possible -- even toward making them true. We really have taken more than a few steps in that direction. But this progress is fragile, and can be reversed, if the "powers that be" decide they are threatened. Look at what China and Saudi Arabia have done to stifle free expression. I don't want to get all "1984" on you, but the big, powerful institutions, if they decide that freedom imperils them, are more than capable of limiting it, by squeezing the choke-points of the technology upon which freedom depends.

I don't think the forces of repression will win in the end, but progress is sometimes like the climb of the frog in the well. We go three steps forward...and two back. We are currently living through one of the worst set-backs for progress and liberty since the McCarthy Era, although (thank God!) it isn't as bad as the hellish watersheds of 1848.

Nice picture of the bridge! It looks quite similar to a number of bridges in California, including the famous one along the Pacific Coast Highway. There's another one of the same general style in the San Diego area, now disused but not yet demolished. It'll be a shame when it finally gets dynamited, but, for reasons of safety, it'll have to happen eventually. Progress has a price!

re The Great Red Horse Robbery, f'gosh sakes tell me more! I Googled it and couldn't find anything. Real book, or mock cover? Seriously, I want a copy! It's a great title!