

NAPA 217



N'APA Official Organ #216

Next deadline: 15 May 2015

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 (copied from the last collation and updated). If there are members interested in joining who have no computer access, special arrangements are possible. Check with the official collator, who is currently Jean Lamb, who may be reached at tlambs1138@charter.net or by snail mail at 4846 Derby Place, Klamath Falls, OR, 97603, or on Facebook (I check it once a week, though).

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 the following day or the closest weekend, considering Jean still has a day job. Undecided members of N3F may receive the collation without contributing until they decide one way or the other.

N'APA has been in existence for a number of years and recently transitioned from being a paper APA to an electronic one. Unfortunately there has been an interruption in its existence and only recently has been revived after three years.

#

Missing this time are—well, a lot of people. Any of you know anyone you'd like to see join us, please don't hesitate to try to recruit them. And so has Sarah Harder, waaah! Come back, Little Sheba! (and if you're old enough to remember where this is from, well, heck... I do plan to issue a notice on the N3F website and in the newsletter about this apa and why we need new members.

#

Cover artwork or photos are invited from all and any members. (including from icanhazcheeseburger, heh).

I would like to dedicate this issue to Terry Pratchett, and plan to have a Bad First Draft of a Discworld fanfic in this issue.

Current Membership List

Member Name	First Contribution	Last Contribution	Cumulative Page Count (up to #217)
Jean Lamb	N'APA #190	N'APA #217	340
Jefferson P. Swycaffer	N'APA #190	N'APA #217	185
George Phillies	N'APA #217	N'APA #217	4

Table of Contents for N'APA #217

Title Member	Name	Page Count
N'APA Official Organ #21	Jean Lamb	4
Archive Midwinter	Jefferson Swycaffer	2
The Murdered Master Mage #1	George Phillies	4
This Spud's for You for 215	Jean Lamb	10
Page Count Total		20

Cover: I found this by searching royalty free images of Terry Pratchett and Death. If someone knows who the artist is, I would like to thank them very much—I thought this picture was delightful. Using this picture here in no way invalidates the artist's rights, and if the artist will contact me, I would be delighted to attribute this picture to you.

Rules and Regulations

1. Every other month (January, March, May, July, September, and November), write a fanzine and send it to the Official Editor by midnight of the 15th of the month.
2. At a suggested minimum, submit at least two pages at least every other issue. Of course, more pages every issue are encouraged
3. The contents of your zine are left to your imagination. You can write about your life. You can write about your activities in fandom. You can (in fact are encouraged to) write comments to others regarding their zines from the previous issue. You are also welcome (encouraged!) to include original artwork (including cartoons). Please, do not include material copyrighted by someone else, unless it is brief excerpts or included with permission of the author/copyright holder. It's probably safer to include an article or story done by a friend or relative than something that has been professionally published.
4. The N'APA-zine will be published in PDF format, which will be distributed by email. Eventually, the zine may also be available on a secure web site, where only Neffers can access samples.
5. The Official Editor may make a snail mail version available to those members who cover the postage.
6. The use of pen names, alternate snail mail addresses (perhaps PO Boxes), or e-mail accounts devoted to N3F are suggested but not required. These are to protect you from spam and other nastiness that might be out there. It is possible that copies of the zine could be sent to persons serving time in prisons.
7. N'APA has a cap of 25 participants each mailing, in order to make it easier to read and respond to everyone. This mailing may be sent to persons who are currently serving time in prison, persons who formerly served time in prison, persons who ought to be serving time in prison, persons who may one day serve time in prison, persons who other persons think deserve to be serving time in prison, persons whom Ken Starr is trying to put in prison, persons who once drove a Subaru Impreza past a prison, persons who either once imprisoned a person or impersonated a prison, persons who can be unduly impressed by a prism, parsons who are currently serving thyme at Princeton, or Persians who are hurriedly hurling chyme that's risen.*

*I didn't make this up.

Archive Midwinter
a zine for N'APA 218
by Jefferson P. Swycaffer
P.O. Box 15373
San Diego CA 92175

(619) 303-1855
abontides@cox.net
jpswycaffer.com

13 February 2015



Comments:

It's a reset! No comments this time, but I promise plenty for later!

For Those Who Might Not Know: Why the wide format? Why the green background? Why the triad of knick-knacks? And who's the cheerful-looking bloke in the corner? Tradition! Tradition, my dear friends, going back to the days when I used to print these things up on actual green paper! That's also why -- absurd as it may seem! -- I always strive to make the total come out with an even number of pages: I used to print the puppies back to back. Nobody loves the embarrassing blank space at the tail-end of a subby!

Subby? Disty? Ah, never mind. Life goes on!

Hey, speaking of life going on, who the hell is this guy?



The context is: this picture pops up, all the time, over on 4chan.org. Now, if you know about 4chan, there isn't too much more I can tell you; maybe you know who this bloke is? If you don't know what 4chan is, tread warily! "4chan is where the devil makes potty." It's an...interesting...place. Some really good porn...and some of the most hellishly vile language you'll find anywhere. Makes Andrew Dice Clay look like a minister delivering a temperance sermon.

Writing: I'm still at it! Haven't sold jack, but I'm still creating. One of my sources of inspiration is Talbot Mundy, who wrote adventure novels in the 1920s. His novels come in series, and yet you don't have to read them in the internal order. Each novel is independent. I adore him for this, and it is the model I have sought to follow. My own novels are "urban fantasy," and, while characters keep popping up again, and there actually is an internal order, the order doesn't much matter.

(Jack Vance followed this model with his "Demon Prince" novels, five space-fantasy novels that do have an internal order, but you can read 'em pretty much any way around without losing much.)

I like to describe Talbot Mundy as a lo-cal Americanized Kipling. His settings are similar to Kipling's: India, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and the lot. Mundy is also available free, via Project Gutenberg.

I am looking, with trepidation and no little honest fear, at self-publishing/e-publishing. I know a number of people who've done this, and they assure me it isn't that hard. Maybe this will be the year I work up the courage.

Life Doesn't Always Go On: My old roomie, Scott S. Norton, passed away on New Year's Day 2014, which is to say, just over a year ago. I'd known him a long time, and we shared an apartment for over twenty years. We first met at the premiere showing of the first Star Trek movie -- the one with V'ger. Scott was wearing an Admiral's uniform from the Star Trek tv series. He and I became friends almost instantly. In later years, his health was fading terribly; he was laid low by mysterious symptoms which his doctors could never even identify, let alone treat. On New Year's Day, I came home and found him. The poor bloke didn't have a will, and no relatives, so he was cremated and the ashes scattered at sea, at the county's expense.

Bit of a pity, as we had plans to bury his ashes on my sister's rancho, where my parents repose. We used to do a lot of live-action role-playing-gaming out there, and it would have been fitting for Scott's ashes to be buried near one or another of our favorite "ambush sites." Many's the pirate, alien, vampire, and dinosaur we've fought in those gulches and rock-tumbles!

Comic Books! I'm still a drooling comics fan, and spend far too much of my far-too-little money on the pastime. These aren't the best of times for comics. DC has pretty much imploded into mediocrity. Marvel is keeping up a good show: the plot-line involving the young X-Men being brought forward in time to the current era is being very well written...and the art is top-notch too!

But where are the independents? Yeah, there are a few. Valiant just made a re-appearance, and BOOM! Studios is interesting. Their title, Fiction Squad is very clever. And Antarctic Press is still popping off one-shots and limited series -- as well as the venerable and superlative Gold Digger, which is absolutely my favorite comic book title being published today.

Gold Digger is about Gina Diggers, an archaeologist -- okay, a grave robber -- and her were-Cheetah sister (by adoption) who go out and explore mysterious ancient sites. The writing is just about the highest "entropy level" I've ever seen in comics. Fred Perry, artist and writer, doesn't even blink at knocking galaxies around like nine-pins. Yet he can write a sentimental scene that is so effective, he can put a grown man into tears and sniffles. (He's done it to me half a dozen times!) Also lots of curve appeal: he draws "sexy" better than nearly anyone.

Hiking: I must be doing something right, as I just wore out a set of hiking boots. Walking for health is a bit of an obsession these days. I saw what lack of exercise did to my old roomie, and I don't want to wither away like that. So, at least three times a week, at least three miles. It ain't Marine Corps Basic Training, but it feels good. I'm in better shape, really, at fifty-eight than I've ever been before in my life. (Which, for a sedentary comic book nerd, isn't saying much, alas.)

San Diego city limits enclose a 6,800 extent of hills, gulches, meadows, cliffs, ponds, and the San Diego River -- and, okay, people in most parts of the U.S. would laugh themselves dizzy seeing this footling li'l creek called a "river." There are places you can step right over it! But it's what we've got, and we love it. So, every chance I get, I wander out there and find a trail, and tromp along it.

Reading, writing, and walkies. It's a life-style!

The Murdered Master Mage #1

George Phillies

48 Hancock Hill Drive

Worcester, MA 01609

A N'APA contribution

What you are seeing is lifted from my novel in preparation *The Girl Who Saved The World*. Comments are welcome.

The novel blurb:

Meet Eclipse.

She's pretty, hardworking, bright, self-reliant, good with tools. She's everything a twelve-year old girl should be. She also flies, reads minds, and is not afraid of necessary violence.

Now she's procured the Key to Paradise. And everyone in the world will be happy to kill her to get their hands on it.

Chapter One

Kniaz Kang's Shanghai Marco Polo

January 12, 2018

Kniaz Kang's Shanghai Marco Polo, announced the sign in the parking lot. Featuring the finest in Chinese, Italian, and Russian Cuisine. Invented Here -- General Tso's Pizza! Invented Here -- Il Professore's Dessert Pizza! It was seven in the morning. The sun barely peeped over the North Cosmopolis horizon, even at a restaurant atop a hill. Inside, Kniaz Kang himself -- a man who was not a prince and whose name was not actually Kang -- supervised the morning help in readying his restaurant for another day. The front windows were filled with his regulars, early risers and High School students from Atomic Tech down the street, all enjoying his superb breakfasts. After all, hash, egg rolls, borscht, and pizza were in large part based on chopping many things very finely, a skill that his employees denied was a gift.

In the morning it was High School students, or thereabouts. The isolated corner window was always reserved for the gang of three or so. Teranike publically denied being what Kang knew she was, namely a Polarian from Otherearth stranded when her empire closed the WorldGate. She had taken a room upstairs, did heavy physical work for the Restaurant with no complaint or sign of fatigue, and did not emphasize what she had in her suitcases.

Dorothy Elizabeth Schumacher was North Cosmopolis's best-known public persona. She had not planned to be

public. However, when the agent of the League of Terran Justice walked up to the front entrance of her High School, shouted "Down with Private Education", and started shooting up student automobiles, she had done what any persona should. In her case, it was put up her force field, run directly in front of the agent, and flying -- literally -- tackle the loon into a wall. She confessed to being the known persona Silk, until then most noted for having rescued dogs, small children, and a moose from various not-quite frozen ponds.

It was not until the next Summer that the Greater Cosmopolis Séance and Channeling Society put her on the national news. The Society had decided to channel the greatest motion picture actor in the history of Oregon. They expected to speak to Stanford Smith, who two millennia ago had made more than 200 westerns and gone on to be Grand Trademaster of All Liavek. The Society's survivors were not quite clear on what had gone wrong. They obtained a physical materialization, not the expected disembodied voice. The materialization was a two hundred yard tall reptile with radioactive flame breath. It flattened the first three persona teams that tried to stop it.

Then Silk appeared on the scene. Only if you looked very carefully, Kang recalled, would you observe that she was now wearing a force field bracer. Any number of people noticed that she was now armed not with her usual Rugbels 0.50 revolver but a Krell disruptor pistol. The flame breath had no effect on her. Her first shot took down the creature, who reverted into the Society's Occult Master.

Asked why she hadn't mentioned having the extremely rare and powerful Krell weapon, she said that she hadn't had them. The now very ex-boyfriend had lent it to her. He now had them back. And they'd agreed, when they broke up, that they would forget each other. A mentalist had ensured that she had no remaining memories of him. No one else had known that she had had a boyfriend, so questions about him remained unanswered.

The usual third at her table was the seventh-grade boy who, if pressed, claimed he was Silk's heroic side-kick, there to protect her from truly dangerous villains. He had his trusty slingshot for that. He confessed that he never carried his slingshot. Someone could get hurt. Today, he was missing in action.

Kang got no farther when the doors slammed in. Running through at top speed was Kang's number-

two man, Wang, the Imperturbable.

"Lord Kang! Lord Kang!" Wang shouted in Mandarin. "The Sun! The Sun! There is a central eclipse!"

Kang tapped the computer screen above his chopping block. Headlines scrolled across the screen. There was much news, but the astral omen was not yet reported. He tapped the screen again. The All-Continent News Network was usually fast off the start, and there was the "Special News Bulletin" warning. The text alternated every few seconds between orange lettering on a blue field and violet lettering on a yellow field, colors reserved for the most serious emergencies. A half dozen split-screens came up. "First seen ten minutes ago in London...Observers in Athens heard celestial trumpets...Moscow reports the sky has turned imperial purple...We now join reporter Vera Durand. Where are you, Vera?"

"This is Vera Durand." The reporter's voice was sharp and clear. Behind her were jagged rocks and a smooth marble terrace. At the center of the terrace was a staircase, leading down. "I am now broadcasting from Atlanticea. The sounds you hear behind me are the waves of the Atlantic. Atlanticea has just been raised from the ocean by the power of the Holy Namestone. Not one hour ago, a figure appeared above the entrance to the Great Maze and announced she would be contesting possession of the Namestone. The island promptly rose to greet her. She, or perhaps he, has already entered the Maze. All-Channel broadcasting of the contest by the Namestone itself will begin momentarily."

"Vera, who is the challenger?" network lead announcer Richard Markovian asked.

"We don't know, Richard," Durand answered calmly, "The Namestone has said nothing. There were rumors that the League of Nations Elite Strike Team was going to try, very soon, to recover the Namestone, but the solitary figure who entered the Maze is not a League Operative. The Namestone translocated us here after she entered. I had no interview with her. I don't know why the Maze deemed her -- assuming 'her' is correct -- qualified to challenge."

Kang returned to his chopping, interrupted by instructions to his assistants. "Benito, just keep making pizza shells. We're going to have a huge business today. Nikolai, that cabbage was a bit mature; steam it an extra ten minutes. Wang, lower the sports view screens. Almost everyone will want to watch. Oh, there's the announcement, Governor Molnar is cancelling public school sessions; 'After all, the kids will be paying absolutely no attention'. Schools stay open so children have a place to be if parents are working. Put the announcement up on the Big Sign." Kang looked over his cash register.

"Ah, Miss Schumacher. The usual breakfast, the usual tab. You didn't know about this in advance?" Kang asked.

"Or are you the next challenger?"

"Me?" She answered good-naturedly. "I just have a few gifts. If I flew to Atlantis, the Namestone wouldn't give me the time of day. You want to get gossip about this, ask the people who take your private classes." Kang lectured, several evenings a week, on the hidden energies that underlay all gifts. His large classes were televised. He also gave entirely private classes to select students, many of whom were on their national persona teams, and some of whom were said to be wanted by members of those persona teams. Registration lists for private classes were well-kept secrets. "I'm going to Tech's library to study. Thank you again for breakfast."

"You are always welcome here," Kang answered. The sports viewscreens were now showing the Namestone's video broadcast of the challenger, someplace in the Maze. The view was always from behind. The challenger's face was never seen. "You are a woman of iron will. There hasn't been a real challenge since that chess player, 40 years ago. You aren't going to watch?"

"Kniaz, whoever it is, she is going to be shredded, degraded, hideously wounded, and in the end beaten to death and blown to pieces. Unless the solid shadows eat her. I couldn't stand to watch," Silk said.

"I can't, either," Kang answered. "Which is why I am not facing a video screen, and why there is no sound behind the counter. The contest will be over this afternoon, if not sooner. At three o'clock that will be bright sunlight everywhere in the world when the Maze marks its newest prey. Then I can watch the news again."

* * * * *

Late afternoon. Kang stood in his restaurant, intervening as need be to maintain the flow of food and drink to his customers. He'd opened both kitchens, called in all the cooks and part-timers, but keeping ahead of the take-out and delivery crowd had been a struggle. All that time, he never looked at a video screen. Someplace out in the Atlantic, someone was about to die, horribly, pursuing a hopeless quest older than history. He couldn't hide from the windows, though, windows that were brighter when

the defenders of the Maze did well, dimmer when the challenger advanced. The same was true all around the world.

Suddenly all went black outside. He couldn't resist glancing at the news feed. "Bangkok - sky is pitch black. Rio de Janiero - the sun just went out. Vienna - only street lights illuminate the Ringstrasse."

The video could be heard in the far distance. "This is Vera Durand on Atlantis. It's a planetary total eclipse. Not three minutes ago, the challenger was losing in hand-to-hand combat. She was grappled and unable to break free. Suddenly everything went dark."

"Vera," Richard Karkovian asked, "The Maze must have won. Where is the Sun?"

"Here on Atlantis, even the stars have gone dark. You only see me because my trusty cameraman has his own light source. Wait, I'm getting video from the maze again."

Kang stared at the screen, unable to help himself. All activity in the kitchen ground to a stop. The screens showed a long, white marble corridor, illumined by two rows of unblinking cressets, flames that burned without pause or flicker. A figure could be seen limping away from the camera, whatever the Maze used for cameras, toward an open door. Who was it? What was going on? By now the guardian must have killed the challenger, but that was the challenger, still barely on her feet. Kang held his breath.

The figure crossed the threshold. Instantly, the room beyond was flooded with sunlight, sunlight visible nowhere else in the world. The point of view shifted.

The challenger stood in the Tomb of the Martyr, the final resting place of the man who had brought the Namestone to Earth. There was the Martyr himself, lying in state atop his sarcophagus, his corpse unchanged over the thousands of years he had waited. Above his hands floated a glowing sphere of crystalline sky, the brightest of cerulean blues. He held the Namestone, The Artifact That Grants Every Wish, The Key to Paradise.

The figure walked slowly across the polished stone floor. A woman, Kang decided. Her garb was torn and stained with blood. Sweat plastered her hair to her scalp. Stains and rends in the fabric vanished as she approached the Martyr. Her hair fluffed out, revealing short, platinum-white, perfectly cut curls. Down from the ceiling floated a gray cape. It folded over her shoulders, draping perfectly, its fall extending almost to her ankles. She reached down and tugged at the fabric. The cape flared, revealing a sigil, a solid circle overlapping a sun in glory.

She reached the Martyr. "I am here," she announced. Her voice, thought Kang was an upper soprano, its tones limpidly clear. "I have read *The Copper Book of Harvest Stars* and obeyed its mandates. I'm here for the Namestone."

"Are you here to take the Holy Namestone, the Key to Par-

adise?" The voice came from everywhere and nowhere.

"I am here to ask you for the Namestone, if I'm worthy. So speaks the *Copper Book*," she answered. Kang listened to the voice. A human female, a young woman from the purity of her voice's tones.

"Speak your name," the voice commanded.

"Eclipse is my persona. I am glory herself."

"Then reach out, Eclipse, and take the Namestone." Eclipse cleared her throat. Someday, Kang thought, her children will cower in terror at that harmless sound. "Then reach out, Eclipse, and I will give you the Namestone."

Eclipse leaned forward. The Namestone rolled out of the Martyr's hands into Eclipse's.

The cheers from the restaurant audience were deafening. Even the oldest patrons would not have watched Jackie Fisher and the combined Grand Fleet being sunk, the last time a serious effort had been made to recover the stone, but most had watched that defeat on period motion pictures. The chess player who won three games and quit while ahead was viewed as exhibiting another of his fabled eccentricities. For this day, mankind had waited thousands of years.

Beyond the Sarcophagus were stairs leading up. Eclipse began her climb out of the Maze.

The sky outside the restaurant flared to bright daylight. Video split screens showed the same all around the world. From a total planetary eclipse, now there was total planetary daylight.

"This is Vera Durand on Atlantis. It's full daylight here. I'm standing on a ledge close to the Grand Exit, waiting for Eclipse to appear. I'll do my best to get an interview," she said.

There was a slight popping noise. Twenty feet to the side of the stairs, a tall, blonde woman wearing plate mail and holding a flaming sword had appeared. "Richard," Durand said, "that's unmistakably Valkyria, lead persona with the League of Nations Peace Enforcers. I must be surrounded by her invisible teammates. Valkyria? Would you care to tell the audience how you feel at this historic moment?"

Valkyria kept her eyes on the stairs. There came the faintest sound of tearing cloth. Standing twenty feet on the other side of the stairs was a short, solidly built man dressed entirely in black: Black boots, black trousers and belt, black shirt and vest, and wide-brimmed, floppy, solid-black straw hat.

“That’s the Screaming Skull, himself,” Vera said, not that any of her viewers did not already know. “Now a Lord of Eternity is here.”

Eclipse came up the stairs from the Tomb. The Namestone was not to be seen.

“Miss Eclipse,” Durand started, “what are your plans for...”

“Be still, Durand. There is important business.” The Screaming Skull’s voice was as chill as a tomb. Durand found herself frozen in place, unable to move or speak.

“Where is she, little girl?” Valkyria snapped. “Where is the bearer of the Holy Namestone?” Kang stared sharply at the video. The Peace Enforcers must have been en route while Eclipse confronted the Martyr, if they did not know her name.

“I’m about twenty feet in front of you,” Eclipse answered.

“Aren’t you ... isn’t the real Bearer a bit taller?” Valkyria asked.

“I am tall. Wait! Isn’t the real Valkyria a bit less ... pudgy?” Valkyria’s nostrils flared. There was nothing, Kang thought, like a friendly, considerate opening to potentially delicate negotiations.

“You!” Valkyria shouted. “Inform the Bearer. She is to turn the Holy Namestone over to League of Nations Supreme Chancellor Lars Holmgren. Immediately! That is a direct order!”

“I am the Bearer. If you wanted the Namestone, you should have walked the Maze first and taken it,” Eclipse answered

“Give it to me! Now! The League has decreed: The Namestone is the property of the world.” Valkyria sounded to be used to having her orders obeyed.

“Give it to you? You and which army?” Eclipse said languidly.

“This one.” Valkyria waved her fingers. Most of the League of Nations Elite Strike Force appeared at her back. They began to fan out, left and right, moving toward Eclipse.

“That’s far enough,” Eclipse announced. The Strike Force kept advancing.

Eclipse gestured, ending with hand facing skyward. The Namestone appeared, its cerulean fire burning a few inches above her palm. The Namestone’s tuneless tune was heard distantly. Eclipse, Kang saw, had brought up sharply her own body aura, a color not different from the Namestone’s, and what sounded to be her own theme music, clearly audible in Durand’s microphone.

“Behold the Holy Namestone. Come no closer, or face my wrath.” Someone, Kang thought, had given her superb

training in rhetoric. “The Namestone is mine. I took it. I’m keeping it,” Eclipse said.

“You defy the League! International law specifies: The League of Nations owns the Namestone. Hand it over!” Valkyria shouted.

“You know the Maze Rule: Namestone belongs to he who takes it. I took it,” Eclipse answered calmly.

“The Namestone is too dangerous for mortals,” the Screaming Skull announced. “Give it to me, or face my wrath.”

“Team! The Namestone is indestructible! Kill her!” Valkyria drew her explosive throwing katana. That weapon, Kang thought, packs the energy density of a star-core bomb, albeit one with very localized effects. She threw it at Eclipse. The Screaming Skull gestured. Black hail fell around the Namestone-Bearer. Lights and sounds marked the rest of the League Elite Team launching their attacks.

Someone, Kang decided, was protecting Durand and the island, both of which would otherwise have been obliterated by the energies being unleashed. Eclipse simply stood there, her shields unwavering as attack after attack struck her.

Eclipse flicked her wrist. The Namestone vanished. She stepped into a royal blue waterfall, unseen bells tolling, leaving behind a vacant flight of marble stairs. Teleport, Kang thought, the waterfall and bells are the material traces of her teleport. And someplace in Europe, a team of teleport blockers are somewhere between having splitting headaches and being little clouds of incandescent plasma.

THIS SPUD'S FOR YOU #25

Jean Lamb 4846 Derby Place Klamath Falls, OR 97603, (541) 882-1635 , email
tlambs1138@charter.net

NATTER: Well, we're baaaacck! I do apologize for being late, though. Mike, my husband, has Hodgkin's disease and is doing his second week of chemo. I am finally pretty much over the Cold From Hell that made me nearly deaf for a week (or the sulfa drugs did, but it still wasn't fun). One of my co-workers inconsiderately had a baby, and will be on maternity leave till the first week of June, which means I get slightly over half her work on top of my own.

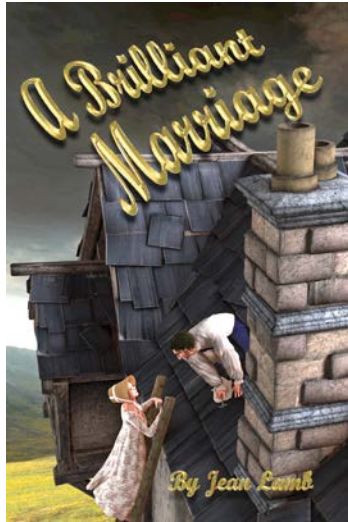
Note: This apa is late because Mike isn't have as easy a time with chemo this time around, and spent a night in the hospital being monitored for delusional thinking and blood clots in his arm. It has be, um, *interesting*.

However, being at Jeld-Wen for one last years has its advantages, and the extra insurance isn't the smallest. Admittedly, I am looking forward to staying at home all day and writing, but that will be next year.

However, in the three years that this apa has been gone, I have three books up on Amazon.



This is the story of Tonio Vitor, who has become Ravin Gambrell for real by the end of the book. This is the first volume in the Ghost Ship trilogy (or more, IN THE SHADE is getting really long and I think I know where I'm going to have to cut it).



This is a very short, fluffy Regency romance (and yes, the scene on the cover actually occurs! Will wonders never cease?), and is mainly a fixup of a NaNoWriMo entry. It was fun to write, and someday, in My Copious Spare Time Real Soon Now, will fix it up even better to about 100k, as I refer to a number of scenes never actually shown in the book).



This is Hatchling, the first of the Tameron and the Dragon series (there will be six books, unless one or two of them get completely out of hand, in which case there will be more). This is all about Tameron's youth in Fiallyn Mor, and for which I have a Map! (I also have a map for the Inner Sea for Dead Man's Hand, which I need to add to the book and simply haven't gotten around to yet).

I would like to add that Hatchling made me about \$5400 last year from the lovely people at Amazon, and helped pay for a new lawn mower, a freezer, and the remaining balance on the pickup. Yay! I set aside about half for taxes, and won't know how much of that I will end up using till I do them (probably next weekend).

And...I am working on book #4, though rather slowly, due to being really busy at work and at home and all that other stuff.



Phoenix in Shadow is the first book in yet ANOTHER series. But after this I promise to write sequels for a while. It's a fantasy with a romance in it, rather than a Fantasy Romance—there is a lot going on beside the sweaty snugglebunnies, and it's a Big Sprawly Thing. I do need to find the tremendously sucky map I once did over several decades ago and find someone who can turn it into a reasonably decent one for a small fee, etc.

And, I might add, spittyfish (who did the cover) is amazingly easy to work with—I explained to her that my heroine, Lady Idabel, is not an Anglo Princess the way she originally looked, but has darker skin and would she please kindly darken it up a smidge? And there you have it.

So I am plugging along on that one, doing the retyping draft because I think my writing style and tolerance for plot holes has changed since I wrote it..thirty years ago? Er, yup.

I have 30 books planned out to write before I die, not counting the incredibly breeding flock of Harry Potter fanfic plotbunnies (about 60?).

What can I say, it might be a living!

And now, I bring you..."Erasure". Assumes the events in RAISING STEAM, and also assumes that the off-key portrayal of the Patrician was meant to show the beginnings of mental deterioration. Dedicated to the memory of Terry Pratchett.

"I know why you're here, of course," the Patrician said to his dearest friend.

Vimes kept his face hard. He had to. Going soft now—well.

"Even Mr. Fusspot is gone, you know. He's next to Wuffles. I hate to think of what the city will come to once...once I join them."

Vimes nodded, once.

"I daresay Warter's Quarter will throw quite a banquet. And the Assassin's Guild will have to retire the bond they've had on me. You could build quite a new mansion, you know, if you took them my head. They wouldn't believe anything else."

"Like the house I have," Sam Vimes said gruffly. He could do it right now—the Patrician wasn't watching him that hard, for once. In fact, the thin man hadn't watched him carefully for years.

Well, that he knew of.

"You'll have to watch Lipvig carefully, but Captain Carrot is highly suspicious of the man no matter how the devil tries to charm him. No sense of humor, even for a dwarf. Then again, the goblins don't have any either, and they still adore Lipvig. No accounting for taste, I suppose."

If he stood up quite rapidly, Vimes knew he could overpower the increasingly frail man sitting across the desk. And it had to be done. There had been...Incidents. Lipvig had been covering for the older man for almost year, and taking the blame for things which he shouldn't. Granted, the fellow was up to other mischief, so it evened out—but still.

The Patrician looked absentminded. But that could also be a trick, one that far too many people had been fooled by in the past. Vimes feared it was for real, now.

"Do you know, the Post Office doesn't ask me to decode bad addresses any more..." His friend now looked sad. "I suppose I shouldn't have sent that elephant to Genua. Or all those books to Lancre..."

"Nobody doubts your ability, sir," Vimes said.

"Well, they should." The other man looked into his tea. "So, why are you *really* here? I mean, I know it, I just want to see if you'll admit it."

Vimes sighed. "I am here as Blackboard Monitor."

“Lipvig would be much better at it, you know. I would be out of this world and into the next without a care. Although everyone would still know he did it, of course. And that’s why *you’re* here, so for once he’s considered innocent of *something*. I always fancied an axe, you know. There’s something so *final* about it. And it would be in your family’s tradition.”

Vimes tried not to think of the one he’d borrowed from the Armory and had left outside the door. The Patrician’s guards had been quite amazed to see it, and equally amazed at the excuse he’d tried to use—‘Patrician interested in seeing a family heirloom’.

“I do hope you weren’t expecting to use just your hands. I still have some old reflexes, and Lady Sybill would be quite unhappy to see you damaged.” The Patrician took another sip of tea. “But then, I’m sure you have something else in mind.”

Vimes hoped he did, too. The window wasn’t high enough above the ground to make fatality certain, even if he could throw his old friend out without losing various body parts in the process. He took a deep breath. “If you really want an axe...”

“Oh, don’t be silly. I just enjoy teasing you.” The older man drained the cup. “I...part of me knows something is wrong. But there has never been a *retired* ruler of this city before. Well, except for the one who left, said he would throw a party till he died, and everyone was still too afraid of him and hoped he meant it. I don’t know too many people who could manage total debauchery for two years, and I’ve never enjoyed such affairs myself.” The Patrician took a deep breath, and then looked startled. “I *wondered* when the damn stuff would work...”

He fell over. Vimes went around the desk and approached Vetinari carefully. Even as the smell of death slowly oozed from bowels and bladder, it would not be beyond the Patrician to fake both and surprise someone who *thought* he was dead.

There was something to be said for the axe.

Sam reached for the cup, poured the remainder of the contents into the slops bucket carefully hidden in a cabinet, and cleaned the cup with his handkerchief. He probably ought to burn it, though leaving it around in the dragon barn would probably have the results he wanted.

It was very quiet in the room. Sam heard only *his* breathing, now. He carefully picked up Vetinari and put him on the couch, and covered him with a quilt. For such a thin man, the Patrician never felt the cold, but *he* certainly did now.

After a couple of moments, he leaned out the front door. “The Patrician wishes to see Lipvig and Captain Carrot. Oh, yes, and his secretary.” (insert name of current one).

The fussy little man arrived first. Vimes sat him down on the floor, so he wouldn’t go running off with any silly ideas about rousing the palace. *Once a policeman, always a policeman*, he thought. “And be quiet,” he said in his best *you’ll be seeing the inside of a cell for a couple of months if you try me* voice.

Lipvig was next. His darting, clever eyes took in the situation too damn quickly, although he was intelligent enough to join the secretary on the floor without being told, his face deathly pale. Vimes liked the other man's sharp brain, though it often caused more trouble than it was worth without someone like Vetinari to rein him in.

Captain Carrot was last. He simply stood silently. That was also good. In the past, the man had sometimes briskly walked to conclusions, especially when it came to Lipvig.

Vimes closed the door and spoke in a soft voice. "Vetinari died this last hour without a hand being laid on him, or having someone else plan it. But now we have to keep the city safe. It is...it is going to be different, to not have a war over who is going to be the new ruler, and I would like to keep it that way."

Carrot nodded soberly. And then he walked over to Lipvig and helped the man stand up again. His usual distaste for the fellow had left his face, as well. "It has to be one of us," the young man said.

"Yes. And I don't want it to be me." Vimes was quite certain of that.

"But you are the only one everyone could agree on," Lipvig said.

"Till they saw how I ruled. Then they would all agree on someone else," Vimes said tersely.

"Lady Sybill could always move her dragon sanctuary to the palace," Lipvig said, clearly trying to be humorous.

Or was he? Sam couldn't actually tell this time.

"I don't want it either!" Carrot said, his voice thick with grief.

Both of them looked at Lipvig, whose eyes went wide with terror. "Oh, no, you don't! My neck has been stretched already, thank you, don't need another rope around it."

Vimes suddenly noticed that Carrot was beginning to show a few white hairs among the red. When had that happened? He could manage Lipvig, he believed, but he knew how much gray was in *his* hair, too. It was really up to the younger man now.

"There is a lot about this city that I still don't understand," Carrot said slowly, looking at Lipvig. "But you get things done. People don't know what you're going to be up to next. *You* don't know what you're going to be up to next. That keeps the Guilds guessing, the way *he* used to. But this last year, people have been afraid because *he* wasn't, wasn't right some of the time. You didn't say anything about it, though. You kept quiet and let me believe that you were being um, well, *you*."

Lipvig looked out the window, and muttered something about hangmen and angels that made no sense, unless you knew how the Patrician thought.

“Why did you sell the right for people to put their names on bricks at the railroad station?” Carrot asked. “They’re just bricks. It feels wrong to walk on *names*.”

“Goblins need a school, and nobody wants them at the usual ones,” Lipvig said. “Harry King said he’d go in for half, but I had to figure out how to raise the rest.”

“You could have just asked the Patrician for the money,” Sam said. “He might have just written a draft for it. Or you could have sold one or two of those golems you have buried out there somewhere, or sucked in the bank or post office for it.”

“But...that’s not playing by the rules!” Lipvig said, a startled look on his face. “Anybody could have done that. It was amazing, that people would pay to have their names walked on. Spike lined up the teachers once the money came rolling in.”

“So. What would you do if you sat at this desk? Bearing in mind that you’ll be watched by me, and by then by Captain Carrot?” Sam asked.

Lipvig looked as if he were going to throw up. Vimes smiled to himself. This was not the usual reaction of a potential tyrant. He remembered Luponse and his assertion that he was going to run the city *right*.

“Try not to die the first year. Or the second. Soak the rich for my personal hobbies.”

Well, that was unusually blunt and quite possibly truthful. “What do you mean by personal hobbies?” Captain Carrot asked.

“Silly things like keeping the streets clean, not letting groups of people kill each other more often than necessary, and wondering which new group of people are going to settle in and end up working for Harry King.” Lipvig stared at the desk as if it was going to start charging on its legs and trample him. “Oh, yes, and keep the wizards out of things, but make them think they’re in charge. Same for the bloody aristos. And the Guilds. Make all of them think I’m the only person who loves them in this mad city. Oh, yes, and try to see to it that Spike doesn’t kill anybody because some highnosed bitch looks down at her.”

Vimes blinked. That seemed like a practical list. Especially the item about Spike. “I think Lady Sybill can help with that last one,” he said. The Patrician hadn’t had a wife to worry about, but he wasn’t about to suggest divorce. Not in Spike’s truly excellent hearing. The woman looked at Lipvig the way Sybill sometimes looked at an extraordinarily recalcitrant dragon—or him, for that matter—‘yes, he could use a bit more housetraining, but he’s *mine*.’

Carrot nodded—reluctantly, but it was still a nod and not a quick draw of his sword, followed rapidly by a head on the floor.

The secretary coughed, and looked distressed. Vimes beckoned him over. “We need to see Vetinari’s files,” he said.

The poor fellow went over to a cabinet and unlocked it.

It was empty.

“He kept all *his* files in his head,” Lipvig said. “Now. let’s see *yours*.”

Those were somewhat more extensive, and Vimes knew he would spend too much time looking through them—but both he and Carrot would need to right away, just to make sure their new compatriot didn’t make any *adjustments* prior to them being properly viewed.

He turned to Lipvig again. “So, what is the first thing we should do first?”

“A big funeral. As fancy as they come. And his ashes should be planted with those two idiot dogs.”

“Why not just bury him there?” Carrot asked.

“He was good friends with that ah, woman in Uberwald, wasn’t he? Didn’t I spend months with no sleep trying to get the railway done so he could go see her more often? I’m sure there were other reasons, but that one was the one he told me.” Lipvig looked grim.

Ah. Sam hadn’t thought of Lady Margoletta, and the sort of favor she might do for a dear friend. “I’ll send her a message on the clacks, then. She’ll want to be here for it.” And, he thought, perhaps it would be a very good idea to bring in that axe. Soon.

They began discussing other things, then. Vimes thought Lipvig would be all right as long as someone watched him carefully. Spike would be the best candidate, since she had already suffered once from Lipvig’s misplaced sense of ethics, and would be closer than either he or Captain Carrot could manage.

But he and Carrot would also do what they could to protect the man—surviving the next year or two would be difficult for any new ruler of this city, never mind one who wasn’t known for bloodymindedness.

Lipvig approached the desk. The top drawer slid open easily, and nothing exciting sprang out. However, the con artist used a handkerchief to handle everything and looked ready to jump, which seemed wise, all things considered.

There were three sealed envelopes, labeled 1, 2 and 3. Lipvig snorted. “I think I know this one, but I’m going to open them all anyway.” He did so, with great caution and avoidance of paper cuts.

“What do they say?” Carrot asked.

“The first one says, ‘blame everything on me, and promise to change it.’ The second one says, ‘Completely reorganize all the departments and the people who are most visible, but keep the ones you really need.’” Then he snorted.

“And the third one?” Sam asked, though he thought he could guess.

“Prepare three envelopes.”

By now, the guards outside the door were becoming quite restless, judging by the audible shuffling feet. It was time for their shift change. The secretary sighed. “Someone has to announce it,” he said.

Vimes nodded. “Might as well be you.” They would need to keep the fellow for a few months as a sign of continuity, and then pension him off, perhaps to Sto Helit or some other distant place. Perhaps Lady Margoletta would keep the fellow around out of sentiment towards his former master.

Then he realized that far distant was harder to find these days with the railways. Well, no matter. He had been ready to make an erasure today, and had the matter resolved for him. Plus, anyone working for the Patrician had to have some intelligence; perhaps the man would take off on his own.

He could hear the news going around, as the usual street noise began to increase. Then he realized he should have called in that de Worde man along with Carrot and Lipvig. He would know what the sorry bluebloods would try.

Carrot and Lipvig went off by themselves—with any luck, they would sink several pints together and discover that both grieved for the man now lying on the couch.

While the guards were fussing over shift change, and two were weeping over the Patrician’s death, Vimes quietly brought the axe into the office. He tried to ignore the tears dripping down his own cheeks as he put a rolled up cloak under the Patrician’s head and neck. No sense getting the couch too stained.

The head came off easily. Vimes breathed easier now; Lady Margoletta could be here as early as tomorrow—well, tomorrow *night*. No sense in taking chances, as Vetinari and the vampire had been together any number of times, and he didn’t especially want to explain the sudden regime change to a newly-risen creature of the night. He shuddered at the thought of Ankh-Morpork being in the hands of a *senile* vampire. The clear-thinking ones were bad enough.

He carefully cleaned the edge of the axe on the hem of the cloak, and set the weapon down on the other side the desk. His hands shook.

Then Vimes glanced up at the portrait of his ancestor. No wonder the axe had been so eager—no doubt it had been a long time since it had taken a king.

He wrapped cloth around the Patrician so he would still look natural. Sam looked at the chair behind the desk and shuddered. No. Not for him. Once he had sat in it, he would think of all kinds of reasons to stay there, and both Lipvig and Carrot would let him.

Vimes left the office, the tears on his face beginning to dry. It was probably a mistake to leave the place empty, but he couldn't stand it any longer.

Sybill and Young Sam were waiting for him at the house. His wife insisted that he take a hot bath and have a cigar first, and then tell her everything, though he knew that she had heard.

But she listened to him anyway, even the parts that nobody had seen him do. She held his hands when they shook.

And then Sybill said, "You and the other two have to go back and stay there. Or someone else will move in there tonight, even with the Patrician still on the couch. I will go with you, though Young Sam will stay here tonight with Emma. It would be a good idea if Ms. Spike and Angua were there, too. That's one thing all three of you have that poor Havelock never allowed himself, and I think it's a strength, not a weakness."

Vimes agreed. In an hour or so, the wake was on. The six of them, not counting Ventinari (now in the hands of the ladies who did such things) were in the office, along with the secretary, who was rapidly becoming drunk. Sam was sort of happy he wasn't a drinking man any more, but wished he dared. Perhaps when this was all over?

And then Lipvig said, "Here, the goblins gave me this to drink a couple of times..."

Sybill mouthed *no*.

But it turned out be a good thing he'd left the axe in the office when some alternative political leaders came calling that night...