

APA-tizer #18

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Rites of Spring

The day dawned bright and breezy, that first Saturday of March. As usual, Don Miller was late, but that morning he was less late, so it was with a smile on our lips and a song in our throats that Don, JoHn Hardin and I set off to seek our fortunes. Well, maybe not

"How do they do this," Don whined. "Every year I spend four days doing voice-overs for this event."

"This event" is the annual kite festival held at Freedom Park in North Las Vegas.

Normally I'd just ignore Don's whining, but today he had a right. Even though the day was beautiful, the breeze decided to take a day off.

"It happens every year," Don continued, "they always hold a kite festival on the one day there's no wind."

He was right, too. Easily there were over a hundred kites resting on the ground; waiting for the slightest breeze. Kids ran back and forth, towing colorfully shaped kites behind. Their successes gained more by the efforts of their legs than Mother Nature.

There was one stunt kite that scoffed at the scarceness of the wind. I don't remember the name of the kite (I'd drooled over it in catalogs, it's wind rating is 0-3 MPH), but the flyer drew pure poetry in the air. Moving with grace and poise, the kite followed the flier's motion in a slow motion dance. First one wing tip, then the other touched the ground. Spirals and loops were no match for this duo.

JoHn sat under a tree, in the shade, and worked on a fanzine article. I watched the flyer and Don smoked his cigarette and gazed off into the distance.

The day continued to brighten and we passed the time, wishing for wind, but enjoying the company. The preponderance of attractive women wandering around helped improve our dispositions, and soothe our disappointment at the lack of wind.

"Why don't we leave?" JoHn wanted to know.

"I want to see the taiko drums, and they're not due on stage for another couple hours," I explained.

"Well, I'm just about done here," JoHn answered, "what do we do until then?"

I suggested that we walk to a local convenience store and get drinks. The idea was welcomed by my friends, and in no time we were off across the park.

Stumbling over strings attached to unflying kites, we walked along until we noticed that a few people were gathered at one end of the field, flying radio controlled model gliders. Soaring around the park, the models ignored the kites and seemed to snort in disdain at their tethered cousins.

"Hey, watch out for our strings," one of the remote pilots yelled.

"Gotcha," we acknowledged with a wave.

Right then, JoHn tripped over one of the lines. "I didn't see that one," my fannish friend screamed.

We made it to the store, did our shopping, and returned to the park without further incident. Choosing an out of the way corner of the park, we sat down

and watched the day go by.

When enough time had passed, we moseyed back to the main event stage and found a good seat for the show. The taiko drum group had started setting their instruments up.

Su Williams found us in the crowd and joined our retinue.

Taiko drums are an old Japanese music form where ten to thirty people, using large sticks to beat even larger drums. The rhythms are unusual in a Western ear, but the precision and timing are fascinating.

This group played four songs, most of which were tone poems meant to create stories with sound. An avalanche rolled through the park that day, as well as a summer thunderstorm. Unfortunately, there was no wind.

I know many people don't think stunt kites are that spectacular, but some do. I do too.

Ken Forman
7215 Nordic Lights Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89119-0335
kforman@wizard.com