

DAGON

#678, APA-Q #589

September 2016

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

This is **Dagon**, a monthly fanzine of commentary on science, science fiction, fantasy, mystery novels, comic art, role-playing games (RPGs), and anything else that seems like a good idea at the moment, is published by John Boardman, 12716 Ginger Wood Lane, Clarksburg, MD 20871. My land-line telephone out of order at present. **Dagon** circulates through **APA-Q**, an amateur press association (APA) which is edited once a month (if enough contributions come in) by Mark L. Blackman, Apt. 4A, 1745 E. 18th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11229. The copy count for **APA-Q** is 15 print copies.

O At
P Great
E Intervals
R This
A Appears
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I Inflamm
O Optic
N Nerves

Dagon also goes to others who have indicated an interest in its subject matter. Subscriptions are 10 issues for \$10 in the United States, and for \$25 elsewhere.

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Box 4422, Kailua Kona, HI 96745-4422. The new address of Beki Taylor, an **APA-Q** member, which I got from Mark Blackman and published in **Dagon** #677, is apparently either misprinted by me, or not new enough, since a copy of #677, sent to that address, came back in the mail.

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In the last issue I misprinted the name of the presumed inventor of the telescope. It is actually Lippershey. As I heard the story, an apprentice of Lippershey, whose name has not come down to us, was goofing off at his workbench when he picked up two double-convex lenses of different strengths, one in each hand, and looked at a distant church steeple through them. It immediately seemed to be much closer. "And the rest is history..."

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Bob Rodriguez, a New York City science-fiction fan whom I have known for over fifty years, was at Lunacon in March, and I enjoyed a long conversation with him there, described in my Lunacon report in **Dagon** #674 (May 2016), where I mis-spelled his name. Bob is now on the **Dagon** mailing list. His address is #7C, 3647 Broadway, New York, NY 10031.

One of the subjects of our conversation was his recent travels through northern Spain and southern France. In mentioning this, I cited some of the small nationalities in those regions, including the Basques or, as they call themselves, Euzkadi. The Basques constitute an ethnic mystery. Their language is not identifiably related to any other, though I have heard speculations about its kinship which range from Berber to Icelandic. While every other European

nationality has traditions or linguistic evidence about their arrival from somewhere else, they do not. Some Basques even humorously claim, "We were here before God."

Some speculation tries to answer one mystery with another. The Basque homeland, northern Spain and southwestern France, is a region in which fully human remains have been discovered. These were named for the French district of Cro-Magnon. Unlike their Neanderthal neighbors, "Cro-Magnon Man" was totally human, possibly leaving the oldest such remains. Clad in contemporary clothing, they could vanish into a crowd and seem to be completely ordinary people. Their most distinguishing feature is their skulls. Many of them appear to have round heads and pointed chins. This is an uncommon combination. Most people with round skulls have rounded chins, and people with pointed chins have slightly elongated skulls.

Once this question occurred to me while I was proctoring an examination in my physics lecture. I scanned the heads, while I hoped they were using their skulls' contents correctly. I located one young man who had a round head and a pointed chin. When I checked the seating chart, I found that his name was Aguirre. That is a Basque name. Of course, nothing has been definitely proven, and all this is still in the realm of speculation

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In the last issue of **Dagon**, which I wrote in late July, I claimed that Donald Rump's favorite word appeared to be "rigged", since he was fond of claiming that polls or primary elections which got results he didn't like were "rigged". What then happened, vindicated my prediction. In the first week of August, Rump indeed claimed that the results of the November general election might be "rigged" against him, causing him to be defeated despite the will of the public. Needless to say, he offered no evidence for this supposition, nor could media commentators find any. Trump is obviously preparing his decreasing number of followers for the large majority by which the voters will reject him. The vote was, he will say, "rigged".

What will he then try? I would not put it past him to announce that, despite the election returns, a majority of the voters supported him, but were "counted out" by a "rigged" count. He might even call for an armed revolt to reject this "rigging" and install him in the presidency by force. This sort of thing failed spectacularly in 1861, and will again but with much less death and destruction.

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On 12 July the annual All-Star Game of major-league baseball was played at the stadium of the San Diego Padres. During that game, the Padres made an announcement that put the game in the shade, and meant a new stage in the sport's development. The Padres have just signed a new player, a pitcher who is major league baseball's first woman, Jenny Baker. She

(continued on p. 5)

THE FILKSONG FILE - VI

I have recently started reading a pseudo-historical novel by Barry Tighe with the cumbersome title *Sir Thomas "British Tommy" Armstrong and the War between the States*. You will find in *Dagon* #676 (July 2016), p. 8, the circumstances under which this novel was written. It begins in 1860, when Armstrong is shanghaied in Singapore and recovers aboard a ship which, he is told when he recovers from the usual drugged drink, is "the good ship *Venus*". It will carry a shipload of mostly Chinese tarts to service the rich, rough, and very ready miners of the California gold rush. It escapes me why Armstrong had to be shanghaied to get him aboard the *Venus*. In the days of sailing ships, the sex lives of seamen was "feast or famine" - "feast" ashore where knocking shops were staffed by everything from seasoned professionals to ignorant and very young girls bought for ready cash at inland farms, and "famine" on the high seas at a time when it was wisely considered bad luck to bring a woman aboard a ship.

The reference to "the good ship *Venus*" brings up two folksongs with (approximately) the same tune, and almost no lines whose presence in the mail would not be deeply resented by the U. S. Postal "Service". It will suffice to print here the first two lines of the first verse of each, and let readers bring the rest from memory if they have ever encountered them before. The songs, genuine products of the "folk process", are "Columbo" and "The Good Ship *Venus*". I have no idea which is the older of these two songs. Their initial lines are, respectively:

"He knew the world was round-o, He knew it could be found-o..."	"It was on the good ship <i>Venus</i> . And by Christ you should have seen us..."
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Both of these songs were composed with the merry disregard for rhyme which is often found in folk songs of unknown composition. In "Columbo", "Italy" is made to rhyme with "tamale", while one verse of "The Good Ship *Venus*" forces a rhyme among "daughter", "water", and "quarter".

"Columbo" could not have been written before the first part of the nineteenth century, since it relies on a pop biography of Christopher Columbus, written by Washington Irving (1783-1859). Irving invented the completely false belief, still sometimes heard in elementary schools, that everyone believed the Earth was flat until Columbus, by his voyages, proved it is round. Actually, the famous debates between Columbus and other geographers were not about the Earth's shape, but about its size. In these debates, the opposing scholars were right and Columbus was wrong. If it had not been for two large continents whose existence no one in Europe had suspected, but which extend from the Arctic to the Antarctic Circle, Columbus would today be regarded as a charlatan. As for the shape of the Earth, that has been known since about the time that contacts were opened up between the Mediterranean basin and the

interior of Africa. Apparently someone noticed that as you traveled southward, the stars in the southern sky were higher while the stars in the northern sky were lower. This could happen only if you were traveling over a curved surface. L. Sprague de Camp used this as the basis of *The Dragon of the Ishtar Gate*, a novel in which a Persian expedition of about 465 BCE, led by a Persian prince and a Greek scholar, travels up the Nile to determine whether any peoples who lived there might constitute a danger to the Persian conquest of Egypt.

One of the first American science-fiction novels was written sometime around 1912 by Edgar Rice Burroughs, a few years before Burroughs hit upon his fabulously successful character Tarzan of the Apes. His hero John Carter was a Confederate veteran who was feared dead by his contemporaries, who had therefore built him a tomb. When visiting this tomb, Carter was somehow transported to Mars, where he encountered several intelligent humanoid but oviparous species who lived near the dead sea bottoms of Barsoom, as they called their arid, dying planet. One of these species was huge green people who had a highly romanticized version of the culture of the original Americans of Jasoom, as the Martians called our planet. Tars Tarkas, a member of the Thark tribe of green giants, became Carter's friend, though Carter lived among a human-sized red race, eventually marrying and having children by the daughter of their king. His military expertise led him to eventually be titled Warlord of Barsoom. However, from time to time Carter still made brief visits to his tomb on Earth.

This situation invited filksongs, and I responded with this verse:

Before John Carter went to Mars to fight with gun and foil,
 He liked a dram of potent Scotch to end a long day's toil.
 And though in most things he was pleased with life upon Barsoom,
 At times he wished he'd placed a flask within his earthly tomb.
 Tars Tarkas, seeing him downcast, then asked him "Why so blue?"
 And Carter told his monstrous friend about the Highlands' dew.
 Surprised, the green man said to him, "We too can do this deed.
 "My tribe distills a tasty drink from dead sea bottom weed."
 The doubtful Warlord asked to try the Martian whiskey then,
 And Tars took our a bottle and a glass, and said, "Say when!"
 John Carter took a sip, then smiled and drank a mighty draft.
 Said he, "No Scot on all Jasoom distills with such a craft."
 And, ever since, that whiskey bears his "By Appointment" mark
 Right underneath the brand name, which of course is "Cutty Thark".

I was unable to come up with a tune for this verse, and would welcome suggestions from readers.

There is a longer and better poetic version of John Carter's story. I cannot pass it along to you, because I only heard it once, years ago, from the science-fiction writer Randall Garrett, whom I strongly suspect was its author. After the verses which retold Carter's adventures on Mars, it concluded with the couplet:

Our story now is ended. Your pardon, sirs, we beg.
John Carter lays the princess, and the princess lays an egg.

If any reader happens to know the late Garrett's version, I would be glad to print it in a future issue of **Dagon**.

Burroughs's John Carter novels illustrate a common scientific error in early s-f. It is assumed that people from different planets could reproduce with each other. Actually, a human being is more closely related to a turnip, than to anything that evolved on another planet. If I hear of a human being and a turnip that reproduced. I *might* give such "science" fiction a little more credence - *very* little. Actually, L. Sprague de Camp made use of this fact as an element of the plot of his s-f novel *The Prisoner of Zhamanak*. Its Earthman hero had gone from Earth to de Camp's planet Krishna, which had a humanoid, oviparous population like that of Burroughs's Mars. There he has an affair with the scatter-brained young queen of a Krishnan monarchy. Her uncle, guardian, and regent, who really ran the kingdom, had been concerned that she might have a child by a Krishnan lover, who might in time take control of the kingdom away from him. He knew that, although males of each species were sexually compatible with females of the other, his niece could not have a child by an Earthman, and so he had no objection to their affair.

Modern s-f has largely recognized the biological impossibility of such plot elements as John Carter's half-Martian offspring. However, it still sometimes appears in alleged reports about contact between humans and the space aliens of popular hoaxes, such as the Australian woman who claimed that her baby was fathered by a flying saucer pilot. One of the many hoaxes about the current presidential campaign claims that Hillary Clinton gave birth to the child of a space alien. So far this silly story does not seem to have come from Donald J. Rump or one of his supporters, but I would not be surprised to eventually find it among Rump's invented slanders of his opponent. After all, he has already announced his beliefs that President Obama was born in Africa, and that Rafael Cruz, the father of Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), was complicit in the assassination of President Kennedy.

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY (continued from p. 2)

was briefly interviewed during the game, and compared her role with that of Jackie Robinson,

who became the major leagues' first African-American player in 1947. Baker is also African-American. As far as I am aware, the Padres have not yet announced when she will begin playing for them. Oddly enough, to the best of my knowledge the sports pages of newspapers do not seem to have brought this news to the public.

There is an added irony to the fact that she will be playing for the Padres. The team is named in honor of the (all-male) monks who brought what they considered "civilization" to the natives of California in the 18th century, mainly by enslaving them.

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The gang of Islamic fanatics which the media variously calls "the Islamic State", "ISIS", "ISIL", or "the Caliphate" seems to be actually named "Da'esh". Unless informed otherwise by a credible source, I will henceforth refer to this alleged nation as "Da'esh". And I will continue to point out that their victims include far more Muslims than non-Muslims. Also, they are actually about as much Muslim as the Ku Klux Klan is Christian.

*

Often a news report features the deeds of people who, though not directly involved in or affected by a disaster, drop everything else and pitch in to help its victims. Such people are sometimes called "good Samaritans" or just "Samaritans", as if Samaritans were people who always pitched in to help in emergencies. The point of such a story, as related by Jesus in the Christian scriptures, is that the Samaritans and his own people, the Jews, were *not* particularly friendly towards each other. This dated from the time of Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, whose forces overthrew the last (Chaldaian) Kingdom of Babylon, and restored to their homeland the Jews which Babylonia had conquered, and forcibly resettled elsewhere. When the Jews returned to their ancestral homeland, they discovered that Samaritans had settled there. As we know from the modern history of Israel, the Samaritan newcomers were deeply and mutually disliked by the returning Jews. Most Jews of that time and place would have regarded the expression "good Samaritan" as a contradiction of terms.

Jesus made his point with his story of a Jew who was robbed and badly beaten. Three people stopped by - a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. The first two, who gave the victim no help at all, represented the most prestigious orders of Jewish society - Cohen and Levi. The tribe of Levi provided religious services for all Jews, and priests (cohanim) were members of a Levite family, descended from Aaron, who served as priests.

Jesus's listeners may have expected the third person in his story to be an ordinary Israelite, completing the three levels of Jewish society, Cohan, Levi, and Israel, these last being ordinary Jews without any particular religious role. But, while his listeners may have expected help to come from an ordinary Jew rather than from a man of higher rank, Jesus probably surprised them by describing the hero of his story as one of the hated Samaritans. His point was, that people should be regarded and judged as individuals rather than as members of

any specified group, and that good people can be found in any nationality. This idea has persisted in Jewish as well as in Christian thought. Nowadays, clerical functions in Judaism are managed not necessarily by men of priestly descent, but by rabbis, people regarded for their learning rather than for their ancestry. Meanwhile, a small Samaritan community has survived, mostly in the Kingdom of Jordan, and any hatred between Jews and Samaritans has long since subsided.

GETTING CAUGHT UP

APA-Qover #586 (June 2016, Blackman) - "The Inherent Difficulty of Science" is correctly described - its problems do not arise from within itself, but as a result of objections from religious types who respond: "That can't be true - the particular variety of holy scriptures which I regard as absolutely perfect say something quite different.")

Blancmange #506 (Blackman) - Donald Rump as a Randist? It makes a *little* sense, since both Rand and Rump were monomaniac nuts who inspired a fanatic devotion from their followers.

The notion that Vikings wore horned helmets is, I understand, a belief inspired by the misinterpretation of a carving on a tomb in Norway. Actually, horns on a helmet would not be a good idea. A hard downward blow on the horn of a helmet might knock the helmet off the head - or, if the helmet were firmly attached with straps, knocking it off might take the head with it. But the comic strip *Hägar the Horrible* seems to have made the horned helmet a permanent part of Viking mythology. (Even his wife, his children, and his dog wear them!)

I expect that we will learn more about Donald Rump after he loses the election in November. He will claim that nothing but a "rigged" count has caused him to lose, and might then try to take power by force. This would, of course, fail, and would almost certainly put him and several of his more rabid followers under arrest. I expect a verdict of "not guilty by reason of insanity". And that will be that!

"Trumplethinskin" is the best description I've yet heard for the Republican presidential candidate. However, (T)Rump does not stand alone. Numerous other Republicans have said things just as stupid, so it's not one lone nut making himself ridiculous. Former Governor Bobby Jindal (R-LA) has called for the abolition of the U. S. Supreme Court. A former Governor of Texas, also a Republican, has called for his state's secession. Virginia's Republican Party has, in the name of "conservatism", tried to establish a program of "Massive Resistance" to preserve legally and socially sanctioned racial segregation in their state's schools and other institutions. (This tells us what is *really* meant by the term "conservatism".) So the real problem is not Donald Rump. It is the party which has, by a large and enthusiastic majority, nominated him for the presidency.

In **Dagon** #674 (May 2016), as you later pointed out, I asserted that it would be unmannerly to sing lines from "Remember Pearl Harbor" if any Japanese had been present. After all, the Japanese were, even more than Americans, the victims of the militarism that then activated the Japanese government. They, and their allies in Europe, did not believe that America was capable of leaping from peacetime to a fully wartime military activity. When World War II broke out, *Portugal* had a larger military establishment than the U. S. did. As we had in 1861 and 1917, the U. S. suddenly put in the field a strong military establishment, and at the end of the war returned to a peacetime condition just as fast.

Thanks for printing the publishing history of "The Thong of Thor". I had not been aware of its publication (not in translation) in a Russian fanzine. And Al Nofi has informed me that he has just completed another book on Rebellion trivia; I am curious to see whether he wrote anything more about the pro-Union efforts of Elizabeth van Lew, Mary Bowser, and their anti-Confederate espionage ring in Richmond itself.

I hadn't known that Fred Lerner discredited the rumor that Rudyard Kipling wrote "The Bastard King of England". Fred is a great authority on Kipling's works, so he probably has it right.

The View from Entropy Hall (June 2016, Meškys) - Your mention of Germans in the Baltic states reminds me of Arno von Wilpert, a man with whom I was in correspondence in the 1950s, and whom I met in Augsburg, with some other Baltic Germans, when I visited Europe in the summer of 1958. Since he and the other Baltic Germans were quite elderly then, they are certainly no longer among us, though his son Gero might be. He once told me that he and the others sometimes referred to themselves as "We Baltics" ("Wir Balten") as if they were the only Baltic people that really mattered. He had a phenomenal command of languages - German, Russian, English, French, and all the Baltic tongues. Once he accidentally addressed me in a language I could not even recognize, much less understand - and then apologized for mistakenly speaking to me in Estonian!

I had not even heard of Mieville, let alone read any of his works, so I cannot give you any pointers about them.

I see that you have also run across the popular misconception about what a scientific theory is. As you point out, the problem does not lie with the term "scientific theory" but with the mistaken popular usage of the term "theory". I have discussed this problem in **Dagon** #677 (August 2016).

You mention several other theories which are accepted parts of science, but are doubted or flatly rejected by people who do not understand what a scientific theory is. The atomic theory of matter was once rejected as "materialistic", since for some reason materialism is thought to be un-Christian. The germ theory of disease is not accepted by people who believe that disease is an expression of divine wrath rather than an illness caused by bacteria or

viruses..

The proposals for interstellar travel, which you mention in your review of Dennis Overbye's article (*New York Times*, 13 April 2016), do not bother with travel faster than light. The impossibility of such speeds seems to be solidly grounded in the scientific evidence, with little if any evidence to the contrary. This is in great contrast to science fiction, in which the time to travel to the planet of another star depends not on the theories of relativity, but on the exigencies of the author's plot.

And is **The NESFA Hymnal** still available? If so, from whom and at what price?

APA-Qover #587 (July 2016, Blackman) - Apparently at this late date nothing can be done about the fact that the name "Frankenstein" is permanently attached both to the monster's creator, and to the monster itself. Also, a few years ago the comic strip *Alley Oop* took the caveman, and the scientist who invented the time machine that brought Oop forward from the Stone Age, to Switzerland in about 1816, where they met Percy Shelley, his mistress Mary Woolstonecraft, Lord Byron, and two of his lovers. (Switzerland was where they were hiding out from the censorious English attitudes about their life styles.) Mary is fascinated by the primitive appearance of Oop, and we are led to suspect that shortly afterwards she writes *Frankenstein*. So as not to shock the readers, Mary is mentioned in the comic strip as Shelley's wife, though at the time she was his mistress, and went by "Mary Woolstonecraft" after her late mother, a prominent Feminist leader, or by "Mary Godwin" after her father. A few months later Shelley's wife, back in England, took her own life, making it possible for Shelley to marry Mary. By the time her book was published she was Mary Shelley. Byron's two lovers were one of each sex.

Blancmange #507 (Blackman) - One possible result of the "Brexit" vote could be a reunion of the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, since both support continued membership in the European Union. Another possible result could be a new British vote, to repeal "Brexit" and rejoin the E. U. As I misprinted in **Dagon #677** (August 2016), the vote for "Brexit" was not 2%. Instead, 2% was the margin by which "Brexit" was approved. As I should have written, Great Britain would have stayed in the E. U. if a mere 2% of the total vote had shifted from "Leave" to "Stay".

At one time there was a campaign to force the United States to withdraw from the United Nations. I had thought that this silly campaign might be revived if Great Britain voted for "Brexit". But that does not seem to be happening.

I am not impressed by the fact that a team of "Libertarians" are running for the presidency. Libertarians regard the government as creating regulations to force us all to obey its dictates. They have used arguments like that to oppose laws ending racial segregation. The "Massive Resistance" plan that Virginia racists tried to impose in their state was proclaimed as a fight to keep that mean ol' federal government from enslaving (white) Virginians. If

President Johnson had not, in 1965, put the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts through a Congress that was heavily Democratic as a reaction to Barry Goldwater's 1964 candidacy, things could have got rather rough across the Potomac from here. As it was, if Virginia Republicans had actually tried "Massive Resistance", most of them would have gone to prison or quietly abandoned the whole notion.

How to... #118 (Del Grande) - I spelled Tina Fey's name incorrectly in **Dagon #673** because at the time I wrote it, I had never seen her name in print, but only heard it on TV.

In an earlier **Dagon** I wrote that battles during the Rebellion were usually named after nearby towns by the Rebels, but after nearby streams by the government. But apparently, to judge from Del Grande's comments in **APA-Q #587**, I had *somewhere* written that the government *always* named battles after nearby streams. Could anyone tell me *where* I printed this incorrect information? I cannot find it anywhere, so I don't know where Del Grande got his question about "the Gettysburg River".

As for the Tennessee battle called "Stones River" by the government and "Murfreesboro" by the Rebels, my great-great-great-uncle Sergeant James Boardman of the 1st Minnesota Light Artillery was taken prisoner when the Rebels overwhelmed the government right at the beginning of the battle. When government troops counter-attacked and won the battle, Sergeant Boardman was returned in a prisoner exchange. This was not a good idea for the Rebels, since they were considerably weaker in artillery and other technological forms of warfare. As for the name of the battle, calling it "the Battle of Murfreesboro" could only call attention to who held that town before the battle, and who held it afterwards. And, during the subsequent March through Georgia, the artillery shot hell out of the Rebels' breadbasket, causing the Rebel troops defending Richmond to desert in large numbers for the sake of a good meal.

Dagon #678

John Boardman
12716 Ginger Wood Lane
Clarksburg, MD 20871

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you may find something of
interest to you on page ____.