

DAGON

#663, APA-Q #574

May 2015

THE DEEP, DARK SECRET AND THE PULLED STRING

(These book reviews are reprinted from *Graustark* #650,
2 November 1995, with thanks to Mark Blackman)

The Gipsie snap & Pedro
Are none of Toms comradoes
ye punck I skorne, & Ye cutpurse sworn
& ye roring boyes brauadoes...

- Anonymous, "Tom o' Bedlam's Song" (1615)

Edward Marston, *The Silent Woman* (1994) and *The Roaring Boy* (1995), ,
New York, St. Martin's Press

Slang changes faster than any other aspect of a language. What the subjects of Queen Elizabeth I called a "roaring boy", we call a "punk", and what they called a "punk" we call a "hooker". Now that we have that taken care of, we can look at the sixth and seventh novels in Edward Marston's series of Elizabethan detective stories, in which the mysteries are solved by the great ingenuity and close attention to physical evidence of his hero, Nicholas Bracewell.

This series of stories shows an England profoundly changed from that of Kate Sedley's series about Roger Chapman, the latest of which was reviewed in *Graustark* #649. A new consensus has established itself on the ruins of the medieval world. The England of the 1590s is almost entirely Protestant, and its people regard the Roman Catholic minority as heretical and disloyal plotters against the queen who to this day is one of the most popular and beloved monarchs in the country's history. From time to time a few Catholic spokesmen or plotters emerge, apparently dedicated to validating this belief.

Despite the fact that these stories are set four centuries ago, the modern conventions of the detective story are thoroughly observed. These two books are respectively of the categories "forty-years-ago-in-Canada" and "string-puller".

"Forty-years-ago-in-Canada" is a characterization given by Lawrence Block in *Make Out with Murder*, later retitled *Five Little Rich Girls*. It describes a type of murder mystery in which the chain of events leading up to the murder started long ago in some distant place. Though such stories are not absent from the Sherlock Holmes canon, Block associates them

primarily with Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer stories. And "string-pullers" are like pulling the end of a string on an old-fashioned feed sack; if you do it just right, the whole bag comes open, and a whole lot of things get spilled out.

Both these novels take place about 120 years after the adventures of Roger Chapman. England's state church is now, logically, the Church of England., and the nation's experience under Queen Mary I (r. 1553-1558), now and forever "Bloody Mary", has convinced it that the new religious settlement was necessary. England now no longer dreams of conquests in France, but of settlements over the seas: the fantastic half-mad charlatan John Dee has already coined the phrase "British Empire". The greatest war-fleet ever seen in Europe has tried to reverse these changes, and has been sent to the bottom of the sea. English, previously spoken by a few people on a remote island, is on its way to becoming what it is today - the world language.

The Silent Woman, - so called from the subtitle of one of Ben Jonson's lesser-known plays - is in the category of "forty-years-ago-in-Canada". Well, not as many as forty years, nor as far away as Canada, a name then known to the English only through Hakluyt's account of Jean Cartier's voyages. For the first time in this series, we go to Bracewell's background, before he left home as the result of a family dispute, sailed around the world in Drake's expedition, and then returned home to become "book-holder" - or prompter and stage manager as we would say - to a company of London actors which in many ways seems modeled after the company led by Richard Burbage, for which William Shakespeare wrote many of his best plays.

Bracewell, it seems, has roots in Devon like so many of England's great seamen, and it is to Devon that the actors have to go. since a narrowly averted fire has caused the choleric landlord of the Queen's Head to evict Lord Westfield's Men from his stage. Just as the tour is about to start, a young man comes from Devon with an urgent message for Bracewell. But before it can be delivered, the messenger is poisoned - and proves to be a young woman in disguise, thus reversing one of the conventions of the Elizabethan stage.

The troupe is pursued on their journey by a singularly ingenious and persistent murderer, and also by an outlaw band, which reminds us of the prevailing lawlessness of those times. This lawlessness persisted despite the savage punishments to which legislators of our time are trying to return, and reminds us that in the intervening centuries an increase in general prosperity has reduced crime far more than any number of drawings and quarterings, beheadings, burnings, transportations, stocks, and pillories could have.

In pursuing the young woman's death and the other crimes, Bracewell is forced to face up to an old family dispute. And this also gets him on bad terms with the woman who has heretofore been the mainstay of his life, Anne Hendrik, a businesswoman and widow with whom

he lodges in London. The coolness between them is not made up well, and continues into the next book in the series.

But if Nicholas Bracewell has trouble in his dealings with women, it is nothing compared with the afflictions of Lawrence Firethorn, who plays the romantic lead in the troupe's dramas. Although he is married to a lusty wife who plays a considerable role in these adventures, Firethorn imagines himself to be attractive to other women, and frequently is. Yet despite his best efforts, book after book, we have not yet seen him consummate even one act of adultery. His best-planned conquests are invariably thwarted by events beyond his control, and most frequently in *The Silent Woman*.

The Roaring Boy returns us to London, and to the classic "string-puller" detective story plot. In this sort of murder mystery, the victim, the murderer, and the motive all seem at first to be a private situation among ordinary people. Then the detective begins investigating, and as the evidence slowly accumulates it gradually leads up to persons of great influence in the highest levels of society, and involves matters which affect the security of the state.

The perpetrators of this murder have apparently already been punished. Thomas Brinklow, a scientist and engineer in the upper-class London suburb of Greenwich, was supposedly murdered by two hired bravos, paid by his wife and her lover. One of the hit men escapes, but the other was recently hanged, together with the adulterous couple.

Brinklow's sister Emilia doesn't see it this way, and she has a play manuscript delivered to Edmund Hoode, the playwright for Lord Westfield's Men. Hoode has been suffering of late from writer's block, and his recent plays show it. But this one, which he polishes up for the stage under his own name, is a work of genius. It is a sensational account of the murder of Brinklow, and claims that the hit men were hired not by Brinklow's wife but by Sir John Tarker, a professional jouster who in turn has as his patron an influential man at court, Sir Godfrey Avenell, Master of the Armoury.

Here the hero is not just Nicholas Bracewell, but the entire company of actors. They put on the play, despite increasingly violent interference from Avenell, acting through hired intermediaries. Despite the problems inherent in taking on a magnate of as contentious a society as Elizabethan England, the company manages to bring the crimes home to Avenell and his henchmen.

It is tempting to regard Edmund Hoode as a fictionalized view of William Shakespeare, but on closer examination it won't work. Few signs of genius mark the plays presented by Lord Westfield's Men - and they are all men, too, since it was then regarded as immoral for women to appear on the stage, and all the female roles were taken by youths apprenticed to the company. (Part of Bracewell's job description is dealing with Barnaby Gill, the troupe's clown, a superb natural comedian and with Firethorn and Hoode one of the trio that governs the company. There are times when Gill has to be told to keep his hands off the boys.) It was not till

the bawdy ol' Restoration, some seventy years after the time of this series of murder mysteries, that England imported from France the novel idea of having women's roles played by women.

However, it could have been tried in England earlier. For a fictional speculation about this, see *No Bed for Bacon, or, Shakespeare Sows an Oat*, written in 1941 by Caryl Brahms and S. J. Simon. This is a hilarious pastiche of a historical novel. It cannot be trusted as history, for it mixes events ranging from 1588 to 1613, but it renders well the spirit of the times - and even has a girl who disguises herself as a boy and becomes a girl boy-player in Shakespeare's troupe!

To judge from their titles, and from what we see of their plots, Lord Westfield's Man presented the Elizabethan equivalent of B movies. In reality, many such plays were written by a minor playwright named John Marston, and bore titles like *Antonio's Revenge* or *The Insatiate Countess*. This leads me to suspect that "Edward Marston" may be a pen name, and behind it you may find someone who once wrote a doctoral dissertation on John Marston's plays and is taking this method of turning that traditionally unrewarding form of writing into a series of profitable detective stories.

THE FOUR AND A HALF KINGDOMS - X

(reprinted from **Graustark** #632, 2 July 1994, itself a reprint from 1971, with thanks to Mark L. Blackman)

In the latter part of the 9th century a horde of mounted archers entered the Balkan Massif through a mountain pass traditionally called "The Queen of Skandalutz's Gap", and swarmed over the eastern portion of this remote fastness. Under the leadership of Arpad the Footpad they ravaged the settled peoples of the region who learned to fear their banner of nine donkey tails. Finally the Pundschrudis were defeated in a rare show of unity among the other four peoples, and were confined in approximately their present holdings by the Battle of Bowel Run, in which the Pundschrudi Khan Uglak the Ugly was slain in single combat by Sir Tingly the Purest, the greatest champion of the Knights of the Trapezoidal Table. (Various authorities place this battle anywhere from 983 to 1057, and Dr. A. Ohne Umlaut of the German Institute for the Suitable Revision of the History of the Whole World, denies that it ever happened.)

Ethnically the Pundschrudis are related to the Huns, the Magyars, the Turks, the Slavs, the Finns, the Lithuanians, the Ossetians, the Vlachs, and the Georgians, owing to certain customs of nomad hospitality in vogue during their days as wanderers. After a brief interregnum (1017-1346) their throne was occupied by the de Dzhenrut Dynasty, founded by Leo Bulan Bayazid Ivan de Dzhenrut, famous as the only man ever exiled from Constantinople on morals charges.

For the next five centuries the Kingdom of Pundschrud obtained a reputation as the most liberal country in Europe. This was the case not out of any abstract devotion to the principles of liberty by the de Dzhenrut Dynasty, but because Pundschrudki officials were either too lazy or too venal to enforce various laws restricting freedom of speech, religion, association, trade, or travel. Voltaire, who never visited the country, praised it frequently for "the fresh air of liberty which blows continually through its verdant hills and picturesque towns". "And through the holes in its inhabitants' clothes, across the open palms of the officials, and out of the lungs of its consumptives," Friedrich the Great is said to have responded.

With Europe's anti-revolutionary reaction of 1849 in full swing, King Lajos VI decided to tighten up his administration. He did so, to such good effect that within ten years the revolutionary Ivo Garbul translated the works of Marx into Pundschrudki and founded an active revolutionary movement. Successive repressions, oddly enough, strengthened the revolutionaries' fervor. Mircea the Merciless sent them to the gold mines, from which they smuggled out enough gold to finance a great increase in their activities. Otto the Odd ordered them torn in pieces by wild horses, but this simply raised the price of draft horses - whose chief breeder, Dogma Garbul, succeeded her father as a leader of the revolutionary movement.

The success of a revolutionary take-over in 1902 was followed within a few months by a counter-revolution, which split the movement into six factions each of which blamed the others for the failure. After the Russian Revolution, three of the factions joined the Communist International, while the others affiliated respectively with the Socialist International, the Right Zimmerwaldian Christian Marxist Anarchist Brotherhood, and the Royal Secret Police.

After the Stalin-Trotsky split, the Communist Party in Pundschrud was taken over by the Trotskyite leader Boguslav Garbul, son of Dogma Garbul and the Crown Prince of Germany. King Eustace the Useless thereupon abandoned the unequal struggle against his own incompetence and turned the government over to General Anagnostopolous, leader of the Stalwart National Iron Fist (SNIF) movement. The effectiveness of the SNIF persecution of the Garbulians can be measured in the fact that membership in the revolutionary organization rose from 700 in 1930 to 16,000 in 1945. A major role in this change was played by General Anagnostopolous' propaganda campaign to identify all opposition to SNIF rule with Garbulian Communists. After the Revolution, Chairman of People's Commissars Mstislav Garbul credited this policy with making the Revolution possible.

Both sides ignored Pundschrud during World War II - Hitler because he regarded the SNIF government as sympathetic to his own doctrines, and Stalin because he rejected Pundschrud as Trotskyite. In fact, Soviet troops carefully bypassed Pundschrud and the whole Balkan Massif during the liberation of the Balkans, lest their men be infected with Trotskyite heresies.

The Revolution of 1947 overthrew SNIF. General Anagnostopolous died of shock when the United States refused to send aid on the grounds that Garbul was not a real Communist. The royal family fled into exile; the present pretender is a waiter at the *Schlagoberst Kaffeehaus* in Vienna. Mstislav Garbul became the new Head of State; he is the son of Boguslav Garbul and Aleksandra Kollontai.

Although professing the doctrines of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Garbul (whose pictures appear at all public functions) the Pundschrakis have relapsed into many of the ways of life of the monarchy. The implementation of a Marxist economy has been hampered by the fact that the Pundschrakis have never bothered to mint or print their own money, being content to use that of neighboring countries. ("Bsides," observed Treasury Minister Ivan Gotny to a reporter over the tables at Monte Carlo, "who of our own people could we trust to run the mint?")

At present Pundschrak does not maintain diplomatic relations with any Communist state, regarding all of them as fallen away in doctrine from proper Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyite-Garbulian principles. A Maoist underground exists, but it has been rendered ineffective by Police Minister Strausskopf's 1969 decree closing all Chinese restaurants and laundries.

Alone among all the nations of the Balkan Massif, the Pundschrak People's Republic maintains a space program. However, this program's effectiveness has been limited by the fact that Ptolemaic astronomy is still taught in the country's only institution of higher education, the Academy of Trivial and Quadrivial Studies.

The country's capital, Drzunkdump, provides examples of all schools of architecture from Degenerate Romanesque through Low Gothic, Gopher Baroque, and Stale Weddingcake, all in poor states of repair. Most commerce is routed along the Suur River, which is navigable downstream. (No Pundschraki has ever bothered to determine whether it is navigable upstream.) Principal imports are insufficiently warned tourists, and money obtained by a version of the Spanish Prisoner Swindle which can be traced back to the 11th century. Principal exports are air pollution, water pollution, Garbulian tracts, and epidemics.

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

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. (Note new address.) My new land-line phone number is 301-515-4271, and my cell-phone number will remain 718-736-4901. **Dagon** circulates through **APA-Q**, an amateur press association (APA) which is edited once a month (if enough copies come in) by Mark L. Blackman, Apt. #4A, 1745 E. 18th St., Brooklyn, NY 11229. The qopy qount for **APA-Q** is 15. For information about receiving and/or qontributing to **APA-Q**, write to Mark.

Dagon also goes to others who have indicated an interest in its subject matter. Subscriptions are 10 issues for \$15 in the U. S., and for \$40 elsewhere.

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It now appears that my numerous problems with my computer and its attached printer have at last been settled. First the ink cartridge on my Lexmark printer ran out, leading to problems with the production of **Dagon** #662 (March 2015). Ryan Stanley, the very outgoing, very competent, and very, very busy recreation director at Montevue, offered to transfer my file for **Dagon** #662 to his computer. He was able to do this, but with complications. For reasons known only to itself, Ryan's computer eliminated all the paragraph indentations, repeated some words, and improperly hyphenated others, while some page numbers appeared at the bottoms of the preceding pages. I tried to correct these, but did not get all of them, and Ryan printed up copies. However, the deadline for **APA-Q** #572 was rapidly approaching, so I rushed 15 copies off to Mark Blackman, and also sent a few out to some other **Dagon** readers. Then Don Donahue, a volunteer at Montevue, was able to buy and install new ink cartridges for my printer, and I was able to print up a "second edition" of **Dagon** #662 with all those problems corrected. So if you got a "first edition" and would rather have a "second edition", please let me know and I will mail you one.

Things were even worse with what I planned to be **Dagon** #663 (April 2015). I had created most of its pages on my computer when, somehow, that file vanished, and I was unable to recover it even with the help of several people more familiar with computers than I am. So I sent all **Dagon** readers including those who get **APA-Q** #573 a letter dated 26 March, explaining why I wouldn't have an issue of **Dagon** dated April 2015, and also informing them of my new address. Then I started to put as much as I could of that lost issue into this issue.

That did not end matters. Once again, my printer refused to believe that it was connected to my computer. This time I got the aid of a member of Montevue's maintenance staff. After trying a couple of things that did not work, she hit upon a solution of elegant simplicity. She unplugged the printer's power cord, and then plugged it in again. This time the printer worked perfectly. I was now able to answer a number of letters which came in from friends and relatives, and have been doing so as time permits through much of April.

And I particularly want to thank my sister-in-law Penny Boardman, as well as Bruce Schneier, for sending me large quantities of stamps. They made it possible for me to mail out the announcements of my change of address. And of course I also want to thank my daughter Deirdre Perez for making this change of address possible.

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The March issue of **CAR-PGa Newsletter** continues from the February issue Carsten Obst's report on SPIEL '14, a huge gaming convention held at Essen, Germany on 16-19 October 2014. The new fantasy-RPG Splittermond ("Splinter Moon") was introduced there,

and is described as “an excellent game-system and a colorful setting, which allows interesting campaigns and suspenseful adventures”. It is accompanied by a book, *Splittermond - Die Welt* (“The World”), “a hardcover-sourcebook about the continent Lorakis” where the adventures take place. The game and the book have a total of 632 pages, and with a recommendation like this we can eventually expect an English translation. Obst describes some of the adventures in detail which will whet appetites. Other new games and gaming sourcebooks are also cited in Obst’s report, including the parody game Spaß Wars (“Joke Wars”) including a new spin-off Spaß Trek. Finally, there is an announcement for SPIEL ‘15, to be held in Essen on 8-11 October 2015. If you would like further information, e-mail to Obst at <swashbuckler.fun@gmx.de>

Each issue of **CAR-PGa Newsletter** contains a long listing of all upcoming RPGaming conventions and their sites. To receive **CAR-PGa Newsletter**, which is published monthly by Paul Cardwell for the Committee for the Advancement of Pole-Playing Games, send \$1.50 a copy or \$45 a year to him at 1127 Cedar, Bonham, TX 75418. (Costs are \$2.25 a copy or \$20 a year to addresses outside the United States. Paul also offers a subscription anywhere by e-mail for \$5 a year.)

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About two months ago, I received compliments on an ability I didn’t know I had. In the Montevue dining hall the birthday of a resident was announced, and we all sang “Happy Birthday to You”. Afterwards, a couple of people sitting near to me told me that I had a very good singing voice. I had never thought this, and I had had no musical instruction since junior high school, a level which it is now fashionable to call “middle school”. And that had done me little good, since mine was one of the first voices to change, and I was therefore given bass parts to sing, lower than my natural singing voice. (Years later, a friend who was more knowledgeable in music than I was, told me that by nature I was a second tenor.) Of course I had engaged in “filksinging” at science-fiction conventions, including some songs with my own lyrics, but I never regarded this as anything but a way to have fun. (The word “filksong” began as a misprint of “folksong”, but is now applied to comic words sung to existing tunes, usually on themes taken from science fiction or fantasy. I have printed several examples in **Dagon**, including verses from “The Orcs’ Marching Song”, “Jar Jar Binks of the Space Marines”, and “Young Man Mulligan”. “Jar Jar Binks” is, as the sidewalk artists say, All My Own Work.

A talent show had been scheduled at Montevue and an adjacent residence hall, with a mixture of songs, instrumental performances, and short skits, so I put in for it. After going over the songs I knew by heart, I decided to sing “The Kerry Recruit”, an Irish folksong that had probably stuck in my memory from an LP disc of folk music in our home in Brooklyn. The song tells how a young Irishman was bored with farm work, and enlisted in the British army. The first verses tell comically of his basic training. Of his first experience with firearms, he

says "The gun it fetched fire, and vomited smoke...", thus indicating that smokeless powder had not yet come into general use. In those days the question "Who is shooting at us?" could be easily answered by looking to see where smoke was rising from.

From basic training the Kerry recruit was shipped off to the Crimean War. This conflict (1854-1856) was unremarkable in strategy or tactics, but memorable as the first war to be photographed, the first war with front-line war correspondents, the first war with female military nurses (organized by Florence Nightingale), and the first war since the Crusades in which England and France had been allied. It began when the Russian Empire moved troops into a couple of Balkan provinces that are now part of Romania. The Turkish Empire declared war, and England and France allied with Turkey to protect their economic interests there. Italy, which was then in the process of unification, joined this alliance in order to prove to Europe that it was also a major power. (This is the same reason why Woodrow Wilson got the United States into World War I, as his private correspondence shows.) This alliance, which sounds a bit like a precursor to NATO, did not enter Romania, but instead besieged the Crimea, a peninsula which Russia had annexed from the Turks and Tatars in 1783. Eventually the Austrian Empire, which was technically neutral, occupied the Romanian regions that were at dispute, and without any real reason to continue the war, the combatants made peace.

The Kerry recruit nearly illustrated the melancholy truism that more Irishmen died fighting for England than ever died fighting against it. He was caught in a Russian cannonade, and lost an eye and a leg. He described the shell that wounded him as "a great Roosian bullet". Then, in the song's last two verses:

But a surgeon came up, and he soon stopped the blood
 And they gave me an elegant leg made of wood.
 And they made me a pension of ten pence a day,
 And contented with shellfish, I live on half pay.

And that was the tale that my grandfather told
 As he sat by the fire, all wrinkled and old.
 "Remember, my boys, the Irish fight well,
 "But the Roossian artillery's hotter than hell."

In these verses we see a little of the economics of war. Ten pence a day works out to be 25/-4d a month, or the equivalent of \$6.16 a month at the 19th-century rate of exchange. Since this was half pay, the usual pension, that means that British soldiers got the equivalent of \$12.32 a month. This compares with the salary of \$21 a month which privates received in the United States when we entered world War II. This low pay became the butt of humor with

radio comedians, and was soon increased.

The reference to shellfish may surprise people who know what shellfish prices look like on a modern restaurant menu,. But in the 19th century, in America as well as in Great Britain, shellfish was regarded as a poverty food, fit only for people who could not afford mutton or pork.

The talent show went off well, and “The Kerry Recruit” was well received. However, some of the actors “went up in their lines”, even with the scripts before them.

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In one of the next two issues, as space permits, I plan to print the mailing list again, with corrections and additions. Please send in any changes you may have for your entry in **Dagon** #660 (January).

GETTING CAUGHT UP

Blancmange #491 (Blackman): My comments on a topic in this ‘zine were badly garbled in the “first edition” of **Dagon** #662 (March 2015), and corrected in the “second edition”. See page 7 of this issue for an explanation of these two “editions”. I am therefore repeating those comments here for the benefit of those who only received the “first edition” of **Dagon** #662.

You think that gematria is convoluted? In one of his essays on matriarchy, Robert Graves interpreted Jacob’s alternate name “Israel” as “Ish Rachel”, “Man of Rachel”. (Never mind that “Israel” (יִשְׂרָאֵל) begins with a י (yod) while “ish” (אִישׁ) begins with an א (aleph).) Graves was trying to prove that Jacob became the leader of his tribe only through his marriage with Rachel, and cited other ancient cultures in which a king gained that status only by marrying a queen. And that left me wondering whether all those suitors were hanging around enelope, the supposed widow of Odysseus, because by marrying her, her new husband would become King of Ithaca. (No wonder Odysseus shot them all dead when he came home from his ten-year wandering around the Mediterranean having affairs with all sorts of women, allegedly including goddesses and sorceresses.)

Dagon #633, **APA-Q** #574

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