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# DAGON

#665, APA-Q #576

July 2015

## 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. My land-line phone number is 301-515-4271, and my cell-phone number is 718-736-4901. **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. 18<sup>th</sup> St., Brooklyn, NY 11229. The copy count for **APA-Q** is 15. For information about receiving and/or contributing 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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In the March **Dagon** I cited a report from the *Washington Post* of 21 January about the postal rate increase of 25 January 2014, which pointed out that this increase was temporary and intended to make up a deficit. On 7 June 2015 the *Post* repeated this report, indicating that the increase *had* to be temporary, according to The U. S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. This means that the cost of 49¢ for a one ounce “small” envelope, and for the price of a “Forever” stamp, must at some time revert to 46¢, as it was before 25 January 2014. Apparently the U. S. Postal “Service” can simply revise the price upwards again, from 49¢ to some yet higher price, until they are once again making a profit. If the USP”S” takes us into its confidence on this matter, I will inform readers. And if the price on one-ounce “small” envelopes goes up, the price on “large” envelopes will probably rise from 98¢ for the first ounce, and prices on heavier envelopes of both sizes will probably also rise. You had better check these matters with a real live postal clerk, since the USP”S” telephone service at 1-800-ASK-USPS refuses to answer questions about heavier envelopes.

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The June issue of **CAR-PGa Newsletter** leads off with a five-page article by Carsten Obst on “Berlin as Background on RPGAdventures and Campaigns”, a topic which arises from his recent business trip to Berlin. The city’s turbulent history makes it a fertile field for role-

playing games, and this historical background is taken up in Obst's article.

In his suggested Berlin RPG scenarios, Obst does not take up a rumor that has circulated ever since the end of World War II. There are people around who, out of fear or in a few sick cases hope, that "der Braunauer" did not meet his fate in the Führerbunker but somehow managed to escape to Argentina or some other place where he might find sympathizers. Over the past seventy years, many ingenious notions have been propagated about such an escape, sometimes involving flying saucers, space aliens, or a strangely extended lifespan.

(The term "Braunauer" is used by people reluctant to speak his name. It comes from Braunau ("Brownfield") the Austrian town where he was born.

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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In the last **Dagon**, I mentioned a drive in several states to pass what are misleadingly called "Religious Freedom Restoration Acts" (RFRA's) which would allow people to refuse services to same-sex couples, based on religious texts which condemn homosexuality. I said that if such laws were enforced. It would allow racists to refuse services to African-Americans and base their actions on a biblical text which describes a divine curse placed upon a mythical character named "Ham", who is alleged to be the ancestor of the entire population of Africa. In the past, some Christians have claimed that this "curse of Ham" justified treating people of African ancestry as inferiors, or even justifying their enslavement.

However, I had not expected this prediction to be realized so soon. In her MSNBC broadcast of 4 June 2015, Rachel Maddow cited the case of a couple who were trying to find an official of the state of North Carolina to marry them. The bride is of European ancestry, and the groom is of African ancestry. Two officials refused to marry them, on the grounds that it was opposed to their religious beliefs to marry such a couple. One of them even gave them a long discourse, based on the Bible, forbidding such a marriage. (Maddow's report did not specifically mention the "curse of Ham", but this is the claim traditionally made for discriminating against Africans.) It apparently did not matter to these men that a U. S. Supreme Court decision on the case of Virginia vs. Loving had ruled that a law against inter-racial marriages was unconstitutional. (In that case, the fact that the couple was named "Loving" was an added irony.)

This case went before the North Carolina legislature, which was debating a RFRA which would authorize the decisions not to marry this couple. Although that bill was patently uncon-

stitutional, the legislature passed it, and also passed it over the governor's veto. We may probably hear much more about it by the time this **Dagon** is published. We may even hear that studies of human evolution indicate that the human species originated in Africa, so historically *all* human beings are of African ancestry.

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Conspiracy "theories" would be better called "conspiracy notions", since these notions are largely unsupported and indefinite while the word "theory" has a meaning much more definite, and firmly grounded in scientific work. But conspiracy notions have a long and disreputable history in the United States and other countries, and are still with us. This might be because the first such conspiracy notion in our history was no fiction, but solidly based in fact, and bloody in its execution. It was the Slaveholders' Rebellion, whose leaders openly admitted and fought for their conspiracy to partition the United States as a means of defending slavery.

The first conspiracy notion of any importance in our history was an anti-Catholic conspiracy that rose in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, probably as a fanatical reaction to the large immigration from Italy and other largely Catholic countries. In many respect it resembled today's notions about a supposed Muslim conspiracy against the United States. In both cases, an alien religion is alleged to be out to conquer the world, and to impose its beliefs forcibly on all Americans. This belief largely animated the Ku Klux Klan, which was anti-Catholic as well as anti-African-American and anti-Jewish. It reached its climax, and also began its decline, in 1928, when the Democrats nominated Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York for the presidency. Smith was a Catholic, and ridiculous claims about a Catholic "conspiracy" were a part of that campaign. Traditionally Democratic states, largely populated by Protestants, voted for Herbert Hoover, the Republican candidate, who won. At the time, the Holland Tunnel was under construction in New York City. Fanatics claimed that it was a tunnel not to New Jersey but to Rome, and that if Smith was elected, the pope would come over from Rome in that tunnel and rule America. President Hoover went on to preside blithely over the worst depression in American history. And the next time a Catholic ran for the presidency, in 1960, he won.

Anti-Jewish conspiracy notions became popular in Europe in the 1930s, but never caught on here to any extent, and they led German believers into a war which smashed their country. But after World War II, anti-Communist conspiracy notions became popular in America, largely propagated by President Truman. They also infected other nations, to the point where Truman was able to establish a world-wide system of alliances against what was described as a "Sinister Monolithic International Communist Conspiracy" (SMICC). Worse, this eventually led to pointless but brutally destructive American wars in Korea, Vietnam, and several other countries allegedly menaced by the SMICC.

These notions also generated parodies which made the whole idea ridiculous.

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R-WI) began accusing some of Truman's own associates and appointees as Communistic, and such accusations quickly became ridiculous but widespread. Some politicians began describing anything they didn't like as actions of the SMICC. from civil rights for African-Americans to the metric system. After the Supreme Court pronounced racial segregation in schools unconstitutional in 1954, racists claimed that this and similar decisions were Communistic. In one extreme case, a white couple in Kentucky sold their home to a black couple, and local politicians claimed that this was somehow Communistic.

Belief in a SMICC suddenly collapsed in 1990, when it was found that a Communistic conspiracy that allegedly planned to conquer the world couldn't even control the Soviet Union. The Russians decided that they didn't want to be ruled by Communists any more, and that was that. Soviet Communism collapsed without violence, so quickly that it couldn't even be called a "revolution". The Soviet Union was quickly partitioned into fifteen republics, only one of them Russian. Some American anti-Communists claimed that this was just a Communistic trick to persuade the world that Communism was no longer a "menace". They even named it "Operation Golgotha", and for a while had a website propagating this notion. But nobody believed them, and the website soon vanished.

But apparently American conspiracy buffs had a psychological need for a conspiracy against whose alleged menace they could lead America. Without Communists, they apparently settled on Muslims as their preferred villains. Now the metric system was somehow an Arabian conspiracy; see remarks quoted in *Dagon* #657 (October 2014). The alleged actions and beliefs of the Muslim "conspiracy" are just copied, with little change, from those attributed to the SMICC.

But a few conspiracy buffs have not given up on the horrible Commies. Scott Stantis's comic strip *Prickly City* has two principal characters, a little girl named Carmen, and a coyote named Winslow. They are, respectively, the artist's views of a conservative and a liberal. In the Sunday strip of 24 May 2015, Carmen is at her easel with paints, doing a portrait of Winslow, who is standing on a box and grinning broadly. Carmen says, "Almost done, my liberal friend." But her version of Winslow shows him grimly marching while holding a huge, tattered red flag decorated with the usual hammer and sickle. This is just the same old conservative portrayal of "liberal = Communist", which we have heard for decades from American anti-Communists. I can easily hear a conservative saying, "*Of course* liberals are Communists! Don't they both believe that white kids and black kids should attend the same schools?" And there was the rhetoric used in Virginia when the legislature decided to fend off the horrible menace of integrated schools. They called this elaborate program "Massive Resistance", and abandoned it only when it became evident that otherwise a whole lot of Virginia politicians would go to federal prisons under the terms of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1965.

“Pizza? What’s that?”

Three generations of my descendants will never believe that I once said that. However, I did. It happened in the fall of 1949, when I had just arrived to begin attending the University of Chicago, at that time the furthest east I had ever traveled. Some of the other entering students, probably New Yorkers, suggested sending out for pizza. They explained this delicacy, and it sounded good to me, an attitude which was confirmed when the pizza arrived. At that time, pizza was probably limited to a few cities with large Italian-American populations.

But it caught on fast. Five years later, when I was attending graduate school at Iowa State College in a small town in central Iowa, a pizzeria opened there. I realized that pizza had now become an all-American snack food. This was confirmed several years later, when I saw a sign with Hebrew lettering on a small shop across Sixth Avenue in New York City’s Greenwich Village. I don’t know the language, but I do know its alphabet, and I read the sign as “pizza”. (Actually, it was of course “פִּיצָה” or possibly “פִּיצָא”. I do not presently live near any kosher pizzerias.) Of course combining pizza with the Jewish dietary laws produces complications. Since cheese is a necessity for pizza, no meat can be on a kosher pizza, not even kosher meat. Fish is regarded as different from meat, but fish or other sea food which does not have scales is forbidden. The traditional anchovies are therefore allowed, but shark, eel, and all shellfish, arthropods and cephalopods would be forbidden. All vegetables are allowed, so the traditional mushrooms can go on kosher pizza. Some places are now putting even pineapple on pizza, but while I like pineapple and other fruits I would not for a moment consider ordering them on pizza, and that has nothing to do with anybody’s dietary laws.

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There are several cable channels which carry news programs, but I find that the best is Cable News Network (CNN). Other news channels, even the excellent ABC-TV, are available, and are useful for local news, but they do not have the international coverage and character of CNN. However, this international coverage has a few problems for American viewers. Many of CNN’s news reporters come from other countries, and therefore give distances in meters or kilometers, masses in grams or kilograms, and temperatures on the Celsius scale. This is not a problem for me, since all scientific work in the United States is done in these metric units, and I am quite familiar with them. But for the benefit of most American viewers, CNN reporters sometimes give these measurements in the medieval units which are now used in only one nation - this one.

Every other nation has abandoned its own traditional systems of weights and measures for the metric system. It would now, for example, be difficult for a Russian to tell you how many *sazheni* there were in a *verst*. But Americans still use a system in which a foot was once the length of the foot of a reigning British king, or a pound was the weight of a pint of water or maybe ale. Moreover, the most ridiculous arguments have been used against the introduction

of the metric system in the United States. Some have called it “Communitistic”, since the metric system was adopted in Russia only after the Communist Revolution. Now that belief in an International Communitistic Conspiracy has collapsed under its own implausibility, some anti-metric propoganda is calling it an Arabian conspiracy or something equally ridiculous.

A few anti-metric fanatics have even bothered to look up the origins of the metric system to figure out why they should oppose it. It began just after the French Revolution, at a time when not just France but every region in France had its own system of weights and measures. It was decided to give the whole nation a single measuring system, based on “natural” units. The meter was originally intended to be one ten-millionth of the distance from the Equator to the North Pole, although a more precise definition is now used. The gram was defined as the mass of one cubic centimeter of water, later refined to be its mass at water’s maximum density, which occurs at 4°C or 39°F. The Celsius temperature scale came in later, proposed by the Swedish chemist Anders Celsius. It defines 0°C to be the freezing point of water at normal atmospheric pressure, and 100°C to be its boiling point at that pressure.

Napoleon’s conquests, though transitory, introduced the metric system to most of the rest of Europe. The British Commonwealth are the most recent nations to adopt the metric and Celsius systems, which is why they usually appear in CNN reports of temperatures in weather reports. Nevertheless, the metric system is sometimes condemned by linking it to regicide and the other excesses of the French Revolution, and by extension to revolutions in general, including Russia’s.

However, CNN has lately cited another irregularity having nothing to do with measuring systems. I am not surprised, or excited, about the fact that one horse can run faster than another. But a great many of CNN’s viewers have been interested for some reasons in three horse races that have recently taken place, as they do every May and June, in the United States. They are the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes, and the Belmont Stakes, held annually at racetracks in, respectively, Kentucky, Maryland, and New York. It had been 37 years since any horse had won all three races, and there was speculation as to whether a horse named American Pharoah could win this “Triple Crown” this year.

Well, as it happened, he could. However, the dictionary insists that the proper spelling of the word is “Pharaoh”. But that is not the whole story. When the colt was born, he was registered, as all thoroughbred foals are, with the agency which looks after such things as racetrack eligibility. And on the registration form, his name was mis-spelled “Pharoah”. And, once his name was mis-spelled, it remained mis-spelled. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* use the spelling “Pharoah”, and, apparently, so shall it ever be.

Needless to say, the horse’s owner is delighted. Before the Belmont, he was asked

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## DAGON DIRECTORY

Subscribers are indicated by the number of the issue with which the subscription expires.  
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CMG: a player in the Calhamer Memorial Postal Diplomacy Game

K: complimentary copy

Q: member of **APA-Q** who therefore receives **Dagon** as a part of **APA-Q**

T: trade copy

This directory is accurate to the date of 15 June 2015, and includes the names of people who once got my postal Diplomacy fanzine **Graustark** and have informed me that they now want to get **Dagon**. Please let me know of any changes, corrections, and additions that need to be made particularly if you want your nine-digit ZIP code, phone number, fax number, or e-mail address added. This is particularly important for electronic addresses, which seem to change more frequently than do postal addresses.

People indicated by "address unknown" have not received a recent issue of **Dagon**, which was instead returned to me in the mail. If I do not receive a correct address for any of them by the end of July, I will remove their names from this list.

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**THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY (continued from p. 6)**

whether American Pharoah would be given a special treat if he won the Triple Crown. The owner replied that, win or lose, his horse would be given his fill of carrots. But carrots are not the only prize for race-horses. Any stallion who wins the Triple Crown is sure to be booked for as many stud fees as his frame can bear. That beats carrots, any day.

Incidentally, there seem to be plans afoot to transform the Triple Crown into a "Quadruple Crown". Virginia has a tradition of horse-racing that goes back to early colonial times. And Virginia has just announced plans to remodel one of its racetracks extensively. It may well be that another prestigious race meet with a big purse is planned in Virginia, equal in money and fame to the Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont.

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