

DAGON

#666, APA-Q

August 2015

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

By late June, I realized that Mark Blackman had not sent out the June issue of **APA-Q**, for which I had sent him 15 copies of **Dagon** #664. After I failed to reach Mark by telephone, my daughter Deirdre offered to try to reach him on her computer, just after I had sent him 15 copies of **Dagon** #665 (July 2015) for the July **APA-Q**. She soon discovered that Mark had failed to mail out a June Distribution of **APA-Q** because contributions had arrived only from him and from me. Presumably he intended to hold them until the first weekend of July, and then mail them out together with anything else that had come in from other **APA-Q** readers.. Burt then Mark was hospitalized for heart surgery, and is now recovering. I again tried phoning Mark, but only got busy signals until the beginning of July. Apparently he was not recovering at home until July.

I have already mailed out copies of **Dagonim** #664 and #665 to non-members of **APA-Q**, whose names are not indicated by "(Q)" in the directory in **Dagon** #665. Mark may eventually combine the June and July **APA-Qs** in a single Distribution, and send it out when he can.

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. My cell-phone's electric charge has expired, and I can no longer recharge it because something is wrong with the re-charger, so I can presently be reached by telephone only by the land line. **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 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.

STRIKING THE FLAG AT THE BATTLE OF CHARLESTON

Talking only with people who share your beliefs can be intellectually hazardous, but it rarely results in nine murders. However, it did in Charleston, South Carolina, on the evening of 17 June 2015, when nine people were murdered at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E.) Church. This is the oldest A. M. E. church in the South, and before the Slave - holders' Rebellion, escapes to freedom were planned there. Later, the church was once burned

down by the Ku Klux Klan, and rebuilt.

On the fatal evening a bible study class was in progress in the church's basement, attended by twelve African-Americans including the church's pastor, Clementa Pinckney, a member of the State Senate. A young white man, apparently unknown to any of the church's members but welcome in the class, was also present. About an hour after the session began, the white man took out an illegally obtained pistol and ammunition, and killed nine people including Pinckney, and attempted to shoot the three others.

The killer was soon identified, tracked down, and arrested. He was identified as Dylann Storm Roof, a name which seemed to me to be highly unlikely. However, it proved to be his actual name, although television newscasters seem to be uncertain as to whether his surname is pronounced to rhyme with "off", "oaf", "buff", "goof", or "hoof" A search of his home and his computer revealed that he is a member of the Council of Conservative Citizens (CoCC), a white-supremacist group whose name informs us what is really meant by the term "conservative".

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It should not be overlooked that Roof was a member of a group with whose aims he agreed. The Southern Poverty Law Council (SPLC) in Atlanta has reported the existence of numerous organizations in the white South which believe that the Civil Rights and Voting Right Acts of 1965 are the ultimate evil and must be eliminated along with all the other accomplishments of the civil rights movement. It is their claim that, since blacks are no longer segregated from or subjugated to whites, whites are now subjugated to blacks and have the right to rise in armed revolt against them to regain their rights. Such opinions may be found on such racist websites as <Stormfront.org>, run by Don Black, a Grand Dragon in the Ku Klux Klan. (Michael Wines and Stephanie Saul, *New York Times*, 4 and 6 July 2015. These articles deal with white supremacists and their contacts with one another on the internet.)

2201 Police are now checking the computers of racists known to have been in contact with Roof. If he informed any of them of his murderous plans, his contacts may also find their names on indictments.

To judge from his statements to the survivors of his massacre, Roof fully expected his actions to set off a violent white revolt all across the South against African-Americans. Instead they had quite the opposite effect. After police seized and made public a photograph showing Roof clutching a Confederate battle flag, the reaction against his shooting spree caused blacks and whites to unite in opposition to his racism, and to cause the descendants of Confederate soldiers to speak passionately in the South Carolina Legislature against him and his flag. And all over the South and beyond, the public display of the Rebels' battle flag generated a long overdue reaction against this symbol of slavery, racism, and treason.

The Confederate battle flag was never a national flag. During its abbreviated history, the self-styled "Confederate States of America" had several allegedly national flags, none of them this battle flag. In heraldic jargon, the battle flag was "Gules, a saltire azure fimbriated argent, and charged with thirteen stars of the third." Actually it was merely the battle flag of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia., and of no other Rebel army

The public display of the Rebel battle flag on public and other buildings across the South was not a product of the Slaveholders' Rebellion. The notorious flag on the grounds of South Carolina's State House went up only in 1961, and was a protest against the sit-ins that then desegregated lunch counters. The addition of the battle flag to the state flag of Mississippi took place at about the same time, also as a protest against the civil rights movement.

The Rebel battle flag reminds everyone that it is the flag of losers, and it became the symbol of losers. The Rebels lost their war, their cause, most of their battles, their slaves, many of their palatial mansions, and their influence on the United States. Almost one third of all southern white men of military age were killed in that conflict - not just wounded, or taken prisoner, or even deserters, but *killed*. The loss of all that human potential crippled the South for decades. The dialects of actors who played silly or stupid characters somehow became southern - remember Fred Allen's foil Senator Claghorn, or the cartoon rooster Foghorn Leghorn?

Some of these losers, in fact, look beyond America to portray themselves as even bigger losers. Sometimes we see, on television news, southerners who not only carry Rebel flags, but also wear swastika armbands. So it is appropriate that the Rebel battle flag removed from the South Carolina State House is placed in a museum rather than being destroyed. I have seen, in a Belgian museum, captured flags with swastikas on them - an appropriate place for them as well.

This revulsion against the Rebel battle flag is being extended to the naming of southern schools, roads, towns, and counties after Rebel generals, and removing from Maryland's state song "Maryland, My Maryland" its praise of the Rebellion and its obscene reference to "northern scum".

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY

The July issue of **CAR-PG**a Newsletter begins with an article by Olive Bullock entitled "Real Gamers Do It with Dice", originally published in *China Dispatch*. This article deals with the development of a large and enthusiastic group of RPGamers in China, who recently held in Beijing the first Chinese convention for tabletop games including Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). The players are described as enthusiastic, and include both Chinese and occidentals. In one game, players are described as fighting, killing, and looting the hoard of a dragon. I am

not sure how this would go over in China. In the West, dragons are invariably described as evil, dangerous, and wealthy - think of Smaug. But Chinese dragons are often benevolent creatures, and the Chinese sometimes prayed to them for good weather and other benefits.

There is also a short report by Ted Skirvin about Anachrocon 2015, with games mainly of the popular "Steampunk" variety. And Paul Cardwell reported on Texicon, held in Grapevine, TX, a relatively new and smaller RPGaming con. Also, several readers sent in short reports on RPGaming. Some of them referred to <www.roleplayingtips.com/readissue.php?number#659>. an online e-zine for RPGamers. (The issue number that you want should be a part of the address you use.)

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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The last issue of **Dagon** took up units of length, mass, and temperature, and their revision with the advent of the metric system and the Celsius temperature scale. It is therefore appropriate to take up in this issue the measurement of time, and the units that have been used to describe it. Units of time apparently need no such revision, a fact convenient to everyone. Our units of time have historically been based upon the solar year and the lunar month. The solar year is defined as the average time between two successive apparent crossings by the Sun of the celestial equator, going north. These occasions are called the "Vernal Equinox" in the northern hemisphere, and are considered the first day of spring, even though it may be snowing heavily on that day where you are. But the Vernal Equinox begins "astronomical spring", as opposed to the local climate or weather. And an average is specified, because the Earth's orbit is not perfectly circular, but very slightly elliptical, and the Earth's motions are slightly affected by the gravitational attraction of the Moon and the other planets, principally the largest, Jupiter. The lunar month is defined as the average time between two successive new Moons.

A little problem arises because these two units of time are not commensurable. One solar year is 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 46 seconds. One lunar month is 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes, and 3 seconds. This meant that alternate lunar months of 29 and 30 days would approximate a calendar of lunar months fairly well if you threw in a few extra 30-day months, to keep that calendar in step with the phases of the Moon.

The serious study of astronomical time measurement seems to have begun in the last of the several Babylonian kingdoms. This accounts for, among other things, the use of the numbers "24" and "60" in our time measurement system, since these numbers had a particular

importance to the Babylonians, possibly because they could be divided evenly by so many other numbers. And Babylonian astronomers discovered a way to make the solar year and the lunar month *nearly* commensurable. They determined that 19 solar years were nearly equal to 235 lunar months. The difference over 19 years is only 2 hours, 5 minutes and 9.5 seconds. This means that such a calendar would gain only one day in over 218 years.

These facts became known to the two most influential ancient civilizations. Greeks went to Babylon to study the latest knowledge in science and other fields, just as, many years later, Romans went to Greece to study. And Babylon had recently conquered the Kingdom of Judah, forcibly resettling most Jews in Babylonia. To this day, the Jewish religious calendar is based on a cycle of twelve years of twelve lunar months each, and seven years of thirteen lunar months each, for a total of 235 lunar months in 19 solar years.

But where did that third standard of time-keeping, the seven-day week, come from? Babylonian astronomers had either learned from previous civilizations, or discovered on their own, that seven celestial objects seem to move on their own, rather than being "fixed" in their positions as the stars appeared to be. These seven objects were called by the Greeks "planets", meaning "wanderers". However, they were not quite what we mean by the word "planet", since they included the Sun and the Moon. Henceforth I shall use the spelling "planet", with the quotation marks, to refer to these seven objects.

Since the "planets" apparently had the power to move independently, they were called "gods" by the ancients. For example, one of them is red, the color of blood. The Babylonians therefore called it by the name of their war-god Nergal. The Greeks and Romans took up this usage, calling them respectively "Ares" and "Mars", for their war gods. Other "planets" were similarly treated.

These "planets" move around the sky through twelve constellations in a circle called the "Zodiac", or "Circle of Life", since all but one of them were said to represent living things. And, since they were all named after gods, their motions were supposed to direct human life, meaning that an astronomer had to be at the same time a serious scientist and a fortune-teller.

Furthermore, the fact that there were seven "planets" meant that there was something important about the number "seven". To this day, seven is regarded as a "lucky number". And if you named the days after the gods corresponding to these "planets", you had a seven-day week, which is still used for religious purposes by the relentlessly monotheistic Abrahamic faiths. And, since seven metals were known to ancient science, they were each identified with one of the seven "planets", so much so that one planet and one metal both bear the name of the Roman god Mercury.

The Babylonians seem to have regarded the day we call "Saturday" as a day of bad luck, since it was named after their god Ninib. "Saturn" to the Romans. Saturn is the faintest and slowest of the seven "planets", which may have accounted for its poor reputation, and so it was

identified with the metal lead. So it seems reasonable to presume that, since their oppressors considered Saturday to be a day of bad luck, the Jews considered it a lucky day for themselves.

When Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylonia, he was enthusiastically welcomed as a liberator by the Jews, who even called him a “Messiah” in a psalm. He restored the Jews to their homeland, and it was at about this time that the Jewish scriptures as we now have them were written down. The establishment of the seven-day week may have been back-dated some 500 years and attributed to Moses to give it a respectable antiquity. This back-dating is a custom many peoples have followed. The medieval English invented a king, Arthur, who allegedly lived at some indefinite time in the mythic past, and who gave them wise rule and military victories. The Iroquois back-dated their statesman Hiawatha into antiquity and made him a god, and the Scandinavians seem to have done the same with the leader who led them out of Russia and into their present habitations sometime in the 1st century BCE. This leader’s name was Oðin, which may have originally been a title, since *odin* is Russian for “one” and could have the meaning “first” or “leader”.

The meanings of the number seven to the Babylonians, who structured their religion and science around it, can be seen in this table of correspondences:

“planet”	Greek god	Roman god	English god	French day	English day	metal
Sun	Helios	Sol	Sun	Dimanche	Sunday	gold
Moon	Selene	Luna	Moon	Lunedi	Monday	silver
Mars	Ares	Mars	Tiw	Mardi	Tuesday	iron
Mercury	Hermes	Mercury	Woden	Mercredi	Wednesday	mercury
Jupiter	Zeus	Jove	Thor	Jeudi	Thursday	tin
Venus	Aphrodite	Venus	Freya	Vendredi	Friday	copper
Saturn	Cronos	Saturn		Samedi	Saturday	lead

I am not sure how the metals were ascribed to their respective gods or “planets”, but if you arrange the metals in order of price, from highest to lowest, you have also arranged their corresponding “planets” in order of their brightness, from brightest to faintest. The high place given to tin might seem unusual to moderns, who have created a number of idioms that describe goods made of tin as cheap and shoddy. But in ancient times ships sailed regularly from the Mediterranean to distant Britain, to get tin from Cornish mines for alloying with Cypriote copper to make bronze, the preferred metal for weapons and other gear before the smelting of iron ores was fully understood. And, to cite the only blank space in the above table, the Christian prelates who introduced the seven-day week to the Pagan English apparently decided to use Pagan English gods whom they considered equivalent to the Pagan Roman

gods after whom the speakers of Romance languages had named the days. The equivalence of Mercury and Woden may seem inappropriate, but the one function that both of these Pagan gods had in common was directing the souls of the dead to their place in the after-life. But the last day of the week had to be called after Saturn because the Pagan English pantheon had no god equivalent to the Roman Saturn.

The incompatibility of the lunar month and the solar year meant that one of them has to be dropped from the time-keeping system. This happened when Julius Caesar undertook to make the Roman calendar more regular and predictable. Prior to his time, the Roman calendar was the plaything of Rome's political factions, who continually adjusted it to make their terms of office longer, and the opposition's terms shorter. Caesar hired a Greek astronomer, Sosigenes, who lived in Alexandria, where there were communities of Greeks, Romans, Jews, Egyptians, and other nationalities who each had their own calendars. Sosigenes decided to completely discard the lunar month, which meant that the first day of each month would not also be the day of the new Moon. And, since a solar year exceeded 365 days by nearly a quarter of a day, he decided that a cycle of three 365-day years and, every fourth year, one 366-day year with 29 rather than 28 days in February, would approximate the solar year fairly well. This creation is called the Julian calendar, and after Christianity became the state religion of Rome it also became the official Christian calendar. These fourth years, now called "leap years", would be those years whose numbers are evenly divisible by four.

When Islam emerged, its scholars took the opposite approach, and abandoned the solar year. Twelve lunar months would make up one year, even though these years were usually about 354 days long. Thus, 100 years by the Christian calendar were roughly the same length as 103 Muslim years.

The Julian calendar served fairly well for about a thousand years. But later a few problems developed. This calendar gained one day in about 128 years. If this kept up, Christmas would slowly creep into early spring, and Easter would become a summer holiday. Astronomers and churchmen eventually began to realize these things, but more conversation than action took place about the increasing discrepancy. Then the Protestant Reformation took place, and any calendar changes decreed from Rome would probably not be accepted in northern Europe.

Finally Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572-1585) hired a German astronomer named Christoph Schlüssel to design a more accurate calendar. (Like many scholars of his time, Schlüssel translated his name into Latin, becoming "Christopherus Clavius". "Schlüssel" is German, and "Clavius" is Latin, for "key".) Schlüssel realized that the calendar was running fast because too many leap years had been observed. He decided that years ending in "00" should be leap years only if they were evenly divisible by 400. Thus 1700, 1800, and 1900 would not be leap years, but 2000 would be, so there would be only 97 leap years in one 400-year cycle. Instead of

100. Since ten unnecessary leap years had been observed, ten days would be dropped from the calendar to correct this mistake..

This calendar was put into effect in Catholic countries by order of Pope Gregory, and is therefore called the Gregorian calendar. Note that in each case the Julian and Gregorian calendars were named not for the astronomer who designed it but for the politician who ordered its use. This is characteristic of dealings between scientists and politicians.

Protestant Europe had a few problems with the Gregorian calendar's Catholic origins. The Dutch adopted the new calendar right away, but then trade is the real state religion of the Netherlands, and it is useful to have the same calendar as your customers. Sweden simply dropped 29 February from leap years until its calendar was in agreement with Schlüssel's. But England and its colonies delayed until 1752, by which time the discrepancy had grown to eleven days. So eleven consecutive days were simply dropped from the calendar, causing some people to riot in the belief that the government was removing eleven days from their lives. A young colonial named George Washington took a more rational view, and merely moved his birthday from the 11th to the 22nd of February. Russia did not go over to the Gregorian calendar until 1917, and the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches still use the Julian calendar for their religious observances.

Considering the Earth as a clock, the Gregorian calendar is still slightly faster than the Earth. However, the difference is only one day in 3,323 years, which is not going to cause significant problems for a very long time. However, the atomic clock is a more accurate time-keeping device than is the Earth, whose rotation very gradually slows down. This is not a major problem, as it will be many millennia before we have to worry about 25-hour days. To keep these two clocks coordinated, one second was recently added to 30 June 2015.

Another little problem with time-keeping arises in the incorrect use of the initials "AM" and "PM". These were originally the initials of Latin words respectively meaning "Before Midday" and "After Midday". But lately I have seen times announced on television in such a way that "12 PM" is clearly intended to mean "noon". (How can noon be 12 hours after "midday"?) Clearly, in the original Latin, "12 PM" must mean "12 hours after midday" or "midnight". And how is noon properly indicated? Clearly by "12 M" - midday.

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In **Dagon** #664 I stated that the important thing in the 2016 elections would be keeping Republicans out of office, rather than electing Democrats,. Since then, several Republican presidential candidates have made statements which support this proposition. Donald Trump, who is currently running a close second in Republican presidential polls, calls President Obama an "illegal alien", claims that Obama was born in Africa, and is now claiming that immigrants who come from or pass through Mexico are very likely to be criminals seeking to practice criminal professions including rape in this country. He claims that, as president, he would build a

wall on the border with Mexico, and make Mexico pay for it. (Does he expect that in a thousand years tourists will come from all over the world to see the Great Wall of America?) Worse, Ted Cruz, a Hispanic and a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, has supported Trump's remarks about immigrants. Governor Jindal of Louisiana says that we ought to abolish the Supreme Court, apparently for making decisions that he doesn't like. This claim is so extreme that no southern white politician thought of it even when they were so upset about that court's 1954 decision that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional. In their administration, President Bush the Son and Vice President Cheney claimed that waterboarding and other forms of torture are necessary "interrogation techniques". Some southern Republican politicians, including a former governor of Texas, have suggested that their states secede. Representative West, a Florida Republican, claimed that 81 Communists sit in Congress as Democrats. (That's more than Representative West now does; he was defeated for re-election in 2012.) Governor Walker of Wisconsin, another candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, is out to deny tenure for teachers at all levels from kindergarten to university professorships, a measure which would ensure that that anyone who wants to keep his or her teaching job must fall in line with the governor's political pronouncements. In short, as I asserted a couple of issues ago, these are crazy people. It should be no surprise that former Republican office-holders are now running for the presidency or other offices as Democrats or independents. This country has not seen this sort of leakage from a major party since the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Whig Party disintegrated as its members became Republicans (as Abraham Lincoln did) or Democrats (as several secessionists did).

GETTING CAUGHT UP

Dagon #657 (me): In **Dagon #665** (July 2015) I referred to, but did not reprint, the extreme statements against the use of the metric system which had been made by some American opponents of the introduction of this system of weights and measures. But it would be more informative if I reprinted these remarks, which originally appeared in **Dagon #657** last October. They are:

"An article by Amir Alexander in the *New York Times Book Review* of 24 August 2014 reports that in the 1970s, when the metric system was being proposed by the United States Metric Board, and even taught in some schools, Dean Krakel, director of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma, declared, 'Metric is definitely Communist. One monetary system, one language, one weight and measurement system, one world - all Communist.'...Now that belief in a Sinister Monolithic International Communistic Conspiracy has declined following the partition of the Soviet Union, other conspiracies are being blamed for metric measurements. So Bob Greene, founder of WAM! ('We Ain't Metric') is upset that the metric system 'is all an

Arab plot with some Frenchies and Limeys thrown in.' The existence and character of such conspiracy notions give us the real nature of the opposition to the metric system."

Dagon #663 (me): One point about the Irish folksong "The Kerry Recruit" did not occur to me until later. The song told the tale of an Irish lad who, in search of adventure, enlisted in the British army just in time to be caught up in the Crimean War (1854-1856). He is severely crippled in that war, and invalided home on a pension. The last verse represents him as telling his grandsons about his experiences.

If, as the song tells, he was nineteen when he enlisted, he would be telling his story sometime towards the end of the 19th century. This means that his grandsons would probably be caught up in the far worse carnage of World War I. And, since allegedly sane politicians in Washington are talking about putting American "boots on the ground" in Syria, it's about time to begin talking about them in the same terms that were used about fifty years ago to describe the politicians who blithely talked about "winning" the war with Vietnam. And let us have no jerking of tears for the soldiers who were wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan. The best thing we could have done for them was to talk them out of enlisting. But it's now too late for that, so we can now, like the Kerry recruit, just point out the consequences of enlisting, or of responding to a draft call. Or, if you have a good singing voice, you can try this soldier favorite from the American invasion of Vietnam, to the tune of "The Camptown Races":

You're going home in a body bag, doodah, doodah!
 You're going home in a body bag, oh doodah day!.
 Shot between the eyes, shot between the thighs,
 You're going home in a body bag, oh doodah day!

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