

DAGON

#693, APA-Q #604

December 2017

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 number is (301) 515-4271. The number of my new cell-phone, like that of its predecessor, 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. 18th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11229. His telephone number is (718) 336-3255, and his internet address is <markblackman@juno.com>. The copy count for APA-Q is 15 print copies.

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. I also trade with other amateur publications.

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As this is the last issue of 2017, I want to send to all readers my best wishes for whatever holiday is brightening this traditionally dreary season for them. Whether it celebrates the birth or rebirth of a god, or an unexpected victory over oppressors, or the approach of a new year, its traditions of celebration, the feasting and festivities, and the reunions with relatives and friends make midwinter welcome. I personally take the view that in remote antiquity it was observed that as the weather worsened, the Sun rose and set further south each day. Some may have feared that it would vanish over the southern horizon and never return, leaving us all to freeze in the darkness. When the Sun instead turned around and began rising and setting further north again, they celebrated its rebirth. However our distant ancestors may have figured it, I want to wish all my relatives and friends a joyful holiday season.

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As I announced in the last issue of **Dagon**, I plan to put a current edition of the "**Dagon Directory**" in the next (January 2018) issue. I am printing below the last address I have for every **Dagon** reader whose copy came back in the mail from the address printed in the "**Dagon Directory**" in the January 2017 issue or an earlier issue. If any reader knows the correct address for any of the readers listed below, (actually, in the listings at the top of the *next* page) he or she is asked to send it to me. If it arrives before I have completed the January 2018 issue, I will include it and my thanks in that issue.

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I fear that I can no longer continue printing and adjudicating moves in the Calhamer Memorial Postal Diplomacy Game. I have not heard for several turns from two of the players, Jim O'Kelly (England) or Jim Burgess (France), and I no longer have a current address for Hank Alme (Turkey). (The player of Austria-Hungary resigned when his supply centers were about to be eliminated.) Under these circumstances there seems to be no point in attempting to continue the game,

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Recently some letters have been returned to me with the annotation "**ADDRESS INSUFFICIENT**". However, the only "insufficiency" in the address was, that I used a five-digit rather than a nine-digit ZIP code. And this happened only because I did not know the addressee's full nine-digit ZIP code. If I do not have your nine-digit ZIP code, there will be a large red check-mark in the gap to the left. Once I have your full ZIP code, your copies of *Dagon* will reach you promptly,

A new set of commemorative stamps commemorates the "Disney Villains". Ten villains are commemorated, with two brilliant pictures of each villain on a sheet of 20 stamps. Altogether there are six women, two men, and two animals (both male), counting Ursula of *The Little Mermaid* as a woman rather than a demi-cephalopod. (What does this disproportion say about the emotions of Disney's writers over the decades?) The women are Snow White's stepmother, the above-mentioned Ursula, the Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*, Sleeping Beauty's stepmother (?) Maleficent, Cruella de Vil of *One Hundred One Dalmatians*, and Cinderella's stepmother Lady Tremaine. (Why are there all these caricatures of step-parents? I'm one myself, and the caricature does not resemble me in the least.) Disney's male villains are Captain Hook and Gaston, the Beast from *Beauty and the Beast*. One of the real beasts is a lion, Scar from *The Lion King*, while the other is a mere fox, and not even in my opinion the chief villain of *Pinocchio*. I recall his name as "J. Worthington Foulfellow", but his stamp gives it as "Honest John". And besides, the most villainous character in *Pinocchio* is the puppeteer Stromboli. If I can get more of these "Disney Villains" stamps, I'll use them to mail this or the next issue of *Dagon*.

Nor are these the first villains to be depicted on American stamps. Sometime in the middle 1930s, the United States printed a gray 4¢ stamp depicting two treasonous villains whose hearts'

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THE SECOND-GENERATION DETECTIVE

(This review of Lindsey Davis's detective novel *The Ides of April*, set in ancient Rome in 89 CE, is reprinted from **Dagon** #651 and **APA-Q** #561 (April 2014). I have promised to review more historical mysteries as I read them, but have been too busy with other matters of late. Until I can read, and write new reviews of, historically set mysteries, I am going to reprint one from about 3½ years ago, at a time when the **Dagon** Directory was only about half the size it is now.)

Lindsey Davis started her books about detection of crime in first-century Rome with a series of twenty novels about crimes solved by the *delator* (detective, sort of) Marcus Didius Falco. In the course of this career he married Helena, daughter of a Senator, had two daughters and a son by her, and hired a British girl named Albia as their nursemaid. Albia had been one of the remnants of Boudicca's ("Boadicea's") failed revolt against Rome, and neither she nor anyone else knows anything about her origins and family. She was so useful in Falco's and Helena's household that they eventually adopted her as an older daughter.

Of the twenty books in which Falco is the detective, *Scandal Takes a Holiday*, *See Delphi and Die*, *Saturnalia*, and *Alexandria* are respectively the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth. They were reviewed in **Dagonim** #614, #615, and #617 three years ago. (I have not yet been able to find a copy of the twentieth, *Nemesis*.) But Davis has decided to let Albia inherit her father's career, and the first book of her detective abilities is *The Ides of April*.

The last books in the Falco series were set in 78 and 79 CE, late in the reign of Emperor Vespasianus. *The Ides of April* takes place in 89 CE, as the reign of his younger son Domitianus is becoming increasingly tyrannical and unpopular. Falco and Helena are retired, living on a legacy from Falco's father, an unscrupulous auctioneer and sometime fence.

Albia is now rather far removed from the teen-aged baby-sitter of the Falco series. Married at 17 and widowed at 20, she is now 28 and an experienced "informer". In these and in many other histories and novels set by many authors in this period, "informer" is a translation of the Latin *delator*, but in Davis's and other mystery novels set in ancient Rome it is to be understood by the reader as "detective". I know of no historical female *delatores*, but they obviously existed, since female clients, particularly divorced or deserted women, would clearly prefer a female detective.

(Albia's detailed description of her office and apartment in an Aventine tenement owned by her father may confuse American readers. Being British, Davis uses "ground floor" where we would use "first floor", "first floor" where we would use "second floor", and so on. When my wife and I visited Germany twelve years ago, a German woman who showed us a medieval building spoke excellent

English but used British terminology in describing it to a group of American tourists. Afterwards I explained to her in German the difference between these British and American usages.)

The first death - there are many - is that of a three-year-old boy who is run down and killed by the drunken driver of an ox-cart. Salvidia, a woman who had inherited the cartage company from her husband, hires Albia to head off the financial claim against her company for the boy's death. When Salvidia herself dies, from no apparent cause, Albia gradually realizes that several Romans in her neighborhood are dying mysteriously. The *vigiles* (firemen who also serve as police) also try to investigate this series of deaths, and are unhappy about her involvement in the case. She is called in for questioning by their tribune but persuades him that she is a competent investigator, and she continues to investigate the murders, if murders they are.

These deaths remind us of the serial killers that America is currently plagued with. In several recent cases there is no connection between the killers and their victims. Apparently the killers just enjoy randomly killing people. Nowadays such murders are done by gunfire since guns are easily available, but in Albia's cases somebody apparently deliberately collides with the victims in public and pricks them with a poisoned needle.

This novel impressed me as being "padded", with characters and events included merely to lengthen it and preserve the complications and the suspense. But eventually we discover that a most unlikely character is a murderer, and Rome is delivered from this serial killer. and, at the very end, we get a quotation from the Roman historian Dio Cassius (b. 155 CE) about just such a historical series of mysterious murders in Rome.

(I use the initials "BCE" and "CE" for, respectively, "Before the Common Era" and "Common Era" because I do not believe that describing historical dates is the exclusive possession of any one religion. If anyone wishes to understand "CE" as "Christian Era" he or she may freely do so.

(As for how it would work to have the same people serving as both fire-fighters and police, I suggest asking people in either line of work how well it would go. I'll start by asking my oldest grandson, the next time I see him. He is a police officer in Raleigh, NC. However, I suspect that he would not think very highly of the notion.)

THE MINISTRY OF MISCELLANY (continued from p. 2)

dearest desire was the destruction of the United States of America: Robert E. Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson. (Jackson, incidentally, was shot dead by soldiers from his own side. I had not realized that soldiers from North Carolina and other "seceding" states were so resentful of the fact that all the good commands seemed to go to Virginians.)

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Frequently in **Dagon** I have quoted the ridiculous things said by people who want to retain

a medieval system of weights and measures rather than, like the rest of the world, changing over to the sensible metric system and the Celsius temperature scale. But some manufacturers are quietly changing over on their own. This is useful if you export your products to the rest of the world and want to label them so that their labels will be universally understood. Otherwise, your salespeople will have to deal with customers who look at your specifications and say, "Poundts? Inches? Gallons? Vot iss diss schtuff?"

Among the manufacturers who want their labels to be understood all over the world, now that even the Commonwealth of Nations (formerly the "British Empire") has gone over to the metric system, are the marketers of soft drinks. Bottled soft drinks are now sold, not in ounces and pints, but in subdivisions or multiples of liters. (For those who have not yet adopted metric units, one liter is 33.8 fluid ounces, or just a little over one quart.) The new standard sizes for soda bottles are $\frac{1}{2}$ liter, $1\frac{1}{4}$ liters, and 2 liters. This does not mean that Americans will also have to adopt the British spelling "litre".

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Conversions between the Celsius and Fahrenheit temperature scales are relatively easy. When the United States goes over to the Celsius system, as it inevitably must, people who grew up on the Fahrenheit scale will find it fairly easy to convert from the Celsius scale used in weather reports to the Fahrenheit scale they may be used to. There are three steps:

1. Multiply the Celsius temperature by 1.8.
2. Add the result to 32.
3. Round off to the nearest degree.

To convert from Fahrenheit to Celsius temperatures, follow these directions:

1. Subtract 32 from the Fahrenheit temperature.
2. Divide the result by 1.8.
3. Round off to the nearest degree.

If you are not used to decimal notation, replace "1.8" by the fraction "9/5" in the above instructions.

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On Sunday 29 October, my cousin Johna contacted my daughter Deirdre and informed her that my Aunt Marjorie Melton had died at the age of 99. Aunt Marjorie was the last survivor of the six daughters of my maternal grandparents George and Harriet Melton. For several years Deirdre and Johna have been in contact, keeping these two branches of the family in touch with each other.

The daughters of George and Harriet Melton, with their birth years, were Ruth (1905), Helen, my mother (1907), Doris and Dorothy (twins, 1912), Marjorie (1918), and Jean (1922). Aunt Dorothy died of pneumonia in her teens, and Aunt Doris wrote a touching account of her death which, as far as I know, still survives with its account of how her twin's illness and death affected her. My mother was the only sister who married happily the first time. On 1991 I was one of several relatives who were able to attend the celebration of their sixtieth anniversary. Johna was the second-born of Aunt

Jean's children (two sons and two daughters). Aunt Doris's first marriage ended early, leaving her unable to conceive children, but about 10 or 15 years later she married again, and they adopted and lived happily ever after. Aunt Marjorie never married.

Grandma Melton was our connection with the Bushnell family, and her sister Aunt Stella kept me educated about some of their more eminent members. As nearly as I can figure out, all the Bushnells in this country are descendants of Francis Bushnell, who moved from Berkshire to Connecticut in 1639. When I was about 8 or 10, I recall that my mother was visited by a Bushnell genealogist who had set out to visit every American who was a Bushnell or whose mother had been born a Bushnell. His intent was to write a genealogy mentioning all these people. He was never able to complete that book, but his notes were bound as a book, and I have seen them in the genealogy section of the New York Public Library. The book is very detailed, and includes prominent Bushnells I have found cited in other circumstances, most notably including Simeon Bushnell, an active member on the Underground Railroad at a time when those words did not refer to a subway system. (Details are included in a book entitled *The Town that Started the Civil War*, by an author whose name I recall as Brandt or Brant, the town being Oberlin, Ohio, where Simeon Bushnell was a clerk in his brother-in-law's bookshop in that college town. In 1858, at one point in his anti-slavery work, he and an African-American colleague named Charles Langston were helping a man named John Price escape from enslavement and get to Canada. Then some professional "slave-catchers" kidnapped Price and started to head back south with him. But Bushnell and Langston snatched him back and got him safely across Lake Erie and into Canada. Bushnell and Langston, however, were arrested and sentenced to three months in jail. When they were released, they were given a hero's welcome by the people of Oberlin, which was a strongly anti-slavery town. (They had been convicted only because President Buchanan ordered the local court to pack the jury with pro-slavery jurors.) This convinced Cousin Simeon that non-violence would not put an end to slavery, and he and another opponents of slavery, Lewis Leary, went to John Brown's farm in Maryland not far from where I now live, and enlisted with Brown. When Brown and his men raided the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in 1859, Bushnell was too ill to go; two years later he died of tuberculosis, which he may have caught in jail. Leary died at Brown's side at the arsenal, and Brown was taken alive, given a farcical trial, sentenced to death, and hanged. Langston married Leary's widow and adopted her daughter. He must have been a good step-father to the girl, because when she grew up and married a man named Hughes, she named their son "Langston". As "Langston Hughes" he became a major author, with most of his themes on the evils of slavery and racism.

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This winter, Maryland had its first snowfall on 29 October 2017. This was not quite as Arctic as it sounds. Like most of Maryland's weather, it came in from the northwest, across the Blue Ridge "Mountains", as they are locally called. (I was born in California, so I know what *real* mountains look like.) So snow fell in Maryland's westernmost and highest county, where there is a town with the appropriate name of "Frostburg", but as this influx of weather came further into lower hills, it fell

as a cold rain, and not very much of that. But Frostburg might be named after a family called Frost, as there is such a family in Maryland. One of its members was severely wounded in the recent shooting spree in Las Vegas. She lost an eye, but by all reports she is making a good recovery from her other injuries.

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On the evening of Tuesday 21 November, MSNBC reported on the problems a Texas woman named Karen Fonseca is having with the local sheriff, a Republican whose name I am not going to dignify by printing it. She had put, in the back window of her car, a sticker complaining about "President" tRump, whereupon the sheriff wanted to arrest her for "disorderly conduct". The sheriff was told he couldn't do that, whereupon Fonseca doubled down on him by putting a larger sticker in her car's window, reading (as quoted by MSNBC) "Eff you, Donald Trump". She plans to defy him on the grounds of freedom of speech, including her full use of the word that MSNBC pronounced "Eff".

Further events in this case will be reported as they occur.

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One of the great many Republicans displeased by "President" tRump is Scott Stantis, artist of the daily comic strip *Prickly City*. The principal characters in this strip, which runs in the *Washington Post*, are a little girl named Carmen, and a coyote named Winslow. Winslow is a Democrat whose beliefs are regularly shot down by Carmen, a Republican. But the two strips below indicate how



little the faithful Republican Scott Stantis regards tRump's opinions. Another *Post* comic strip, Tom Thaves's *Frank and Ernest*, displays a non-political nuisance - the way in which a song can get stuck

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THE FILKSONG FILE - X

The continuation of undeclared wars in several foreign nations by both Republican and Democratic presidents calls for satire and other forms of opposition. Fortunately, numerous satirical compositions already exist to express this opposition. One of the oldest comes from a book of songs, some of them written over a hundred years ago by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). This radical labor union still exists, though much smaller and less influential than it once was. And its nickname also survives, dating from its "invention" by a Chinese-Canadian laundryman in British Columbia whose support of the IWW was stronger than his command of the English language. His pronunciation of the initials "IWW" came out as "eye-wobbily-wobbily", and the organization is therefore still known as the "Wobblies".

If I had available the "Wobbly" songbook I could give more details about the song below, and if any reader could provide its author's name and its date of composition, I would be grateful, and would print them in a future issue of **Dagon**. As matters stand, I can provide the words from memory. Its tune, obviously, is "Onward, Christian soldiers".

Onward, Christian soldiers, duty's way is plain,
Slay your Christian neighbors, or by them be slain.
Pulpiteers are spouting effervescent swill.
God above is calling you to rob and rape and kill,
All your acts are sanctified by the Lamb on high.
If you love the Holy Ghost go murder, pray, and die!

Onward, Christian soldiers, rip and tear and smite.
Let the gentle Jesus bless your dynamite.
Splinter skulls with shrapnel, fertilize the sod.
Folks who do not speak your tongue deserve the curse of God.
File your bullets' noses flat, poison every well.
God decrees your enemies will all go straight to Hell!

Onward, Christian soldiers, blighting all you meet,
Trampling human freedom under pious feet.
Praise the Lord whose dollar sign dupes his favored race,
Make the foreign trash respect your bullion brand of grace.
Trust in mock salvation, serve as pirates' tools.
History will say of you, "That pack of God-damned fools!"¹⁰

I can recall a few more lines from other verses of this song, and will print those verses if anyone knows them and can send them to me.

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in your memory. One of these songs got stuck in mine during the broadcast of the World (soccer) Cup final in 2010. The game was Netherlands vs. Spain, and as a man with some Dutch ancestry I eagerly followed the fortunes of the Netherlands. As is usual, both national anthems were played before the game, and the Dutch national anthem, the *Wilhelmus*, is in my reckoning the finer musically. (A Dutchman named Philip Marnix put, to the tune of a French Protestant hymn, words honoring Willem the Silent, the leader of the Dutch movement for national independence against - you guessed it - Spain.) The tune did not work, however; the Spanish won the championship in 2010, and is favored for the 2018 championship as well. And this edition of *Frank and Ernest* expresses my reaction to



the musical domination of the Dutch team.

While I was typing up the last pages of the November *Dagon*, there suddenly occurred to my trick memory, fragmentary pieces of a book I had read several decades ago. I could not remember its title, the protagonist's name, the language in which it was originally written, major elements of its plot, or very much else. But, as I put my complaints about my fragmentary memory into print, I suddenly recalled that the chief character in this book was named "Mony Vibescu". That didn't put many of its other details into my account of the book, but it did leave me with the impression that I really wasn't interested in any other details about it. So readers are asked not to bother with digging up any other details about it.

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Recent issues of the *CAR-PGa Newsletter*, the monthly publication of the Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games, have been published a bit late, and I have also been late in commenting on them in *Dagon*. But, as far as I can, I will try to catch up with these comments in the next issues of *Dagon*. Meanwhile, readers are urged to send announcements of upcoming gaming events, and reports of recent RPG conventions which they have attended. These reports should be sent to

David Millians, the editor of the **CAR-PGa Newsletter**. For a subscription to **CAR-PGa Newsletter**, send \$1.50 a copy or \$15.00 a year to David Millians, Paideia School, 1509 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307. (For foreign readers that is \$2.25 a copy or \$20.00 a year.)

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Deirdre and I had Thanksgiving dinner at the home of her boyfriend Robert. His mother had assembled all the traditional elements of a major Thanksgiving dinner, despite being leg-less and wheelchair-bound: roast turkey, ham, fried chicken, sweet potatoes, *two* bean casseroles, and pumpkin pie. Most of the other guests were Robert's friends, and the meal was served buffet-style. We all ate to satiation, discussed among other things the current spectator sports, and has an excellent time.

Other news is not so good. I heard from Deirdre and from Mark Blackman of the deaths of Tom Byro and Dee Potter. And Perdita, in the nursing home in Frederick, has gone into a severe decline that has us all very worried. Deirdre spends almost all her spare time with her there, and Karina has come up from Florida to also visit her. Since I currently keep very irregular hours, I am often asleep when Deirdre and/or Karina visit her, and they are reluctant to wake me when they leave, so I have not been with her as much as I would like. But they keep me posted on her condition, and I am deeply worried.

* * * * *

On the morning of Sunday 26 November, Deirdre came in and informed me that Perdita had died during the previous night. On the previous day we had spent several hours at her side, when she had seemed to be in a severe decline, so the news had not surprised either of us. I had already prepared all the rest of this issue for Deirdre to duplicate on the 28th so Mark Blackman could mail it out with **APA-Q** on 2 December, and there was just enough space to add this brief announcement. I will have details about our memorial meeting in the January **Dagon**. All of her descendants will gather here next week for a remembrance which I will describe in that issue.

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Dagon #693 (APA-Q #602)

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