

DAGON

#21

APA-F Mailing #41

16 April 1965

THE OTHER I

When Dan Goodman first told me about the intertemporal crowd at "The Busted Rocket", I expected to meet an interesting lot of people. But I had not anticipated that the inhabitants of the various time lines which intersected near there would include Aelle Kerdinga. I had met Aelle on my first trip there, and found him to be an Englishman from a world in which the Normans had never settled Normandy. After about an hour of incidental conversation with him, I found that he was me - that is, our ancestors had been identical in the two time lines, and he and I were genetically identical.

Naturally, we hit it off perfectly - what better friend could a man look for than himself? On our next visit to "The Busted Rocket" we compared the histories of our time lines. I was able to give him somewhat more information about my line than he could respond with on his history, as he was not so well read. Military service was virtually expected of the hereditary aristocracy to which he belonged, and it had left him less time for book-learning. (It had also left him some thirty pounds lighter than I, and more heavily muscled.)

Aelle's Europe was in about the same political state as the Europe of 1650 in our history. The major power of his western Europe was, much to my surprise, Ireland. The Keltic kingdoms of this island had been united by a Norse conquest in the 11th century, conquered again by the French after a war of succession in the 13th, and then set out on its own empire-building. At one time all Great Britain had been under their rule, and they still held the entire west coast of the larger island and all of Scotland except the Lothians. The rest of Britain was divided among a number of squabbling principalities, among which was the South Saxon grand duchy to which Aelle was heir. The mixture of Keltic, Saxon, Danish, and French influence had made our versions of the English language mutually intelligible.

"And the present High King of Ireland is Donald VIII, of the House of O'Niell-Sanson-Evreux," he finished, "though an intrigue between his mother, Queen Hedwig, and Lord Muldoon is bruited about, and his foes call him 'Fitz-Muldoon' in mockery. He claims the overlordship of all England, but if he attempted to make it a reality, it would mean war with Burgundy."

A cultural movement analogous to the Renaissance was sweeping Aelle's Europe - but without a Reformation. The papacy had, in his history, generally taken a milder line with temporal powers and with the common people. Thus, no countervailing nationalist or schismatic movements had been called forth, and the Church really did maintain the supernatural authority which is the shadow of a ghost in our world.

In the course of one of our discussions with Dan, Aelle happened to mention that there are no more Jews on his time line. Persecution directed against them had been much rarer, and the advantages of conforming with the majority religion had gradually worn down the separatist traditions of Judaism. It had taken a great deal of time, but in Aelle's world the last Jews had been converted about 1650. When Aelle learned that Dan's Jewish, he spent several hours questioning him closely on the history, beliefs, and traditions of a people who, in his world, were as one with the Albignians or the Adinists.

This naturally led us into the Nazi persecutions, and into the history of our own world. Aelle was skeptical about the democratic theories of our world, and regarded the Fascist and Communist states of our 20th century as natural consequences, rather than perversions, of the democratic ideology. "For, look you," said he, "some must lead and some must follow. And if one hawk fly the fastest through his breeding, so must one man be meetest to lead by his. Deny this, and the leaders of your states are not noblemen, but peasants and captains of mercenaries grown great. Of the two great

tyrannies of Europe in your 20th century, one was founded by a low-born man-at-arms and the other by a jack-priest of a Caucasian hill-man."

"Yes," I replied, "but each of these took control of his country only after it had been led to disaster by an emperor of impeccable ancient lineage and the brains of a sick canary. A royal family can produce ten good-and-wise-kings, one after the other, and yet lose everything if the eleventh is a weakling."

"Blood will tell," Aelle maintained. "It was even so with Ethelwald IV in Northumberland. But his Witangemot deposed him after three years, and elected his brother Ethelstan. And if I should have my wits addled by a blow on the pate in my next battle, the Witangemot of South Saxonia would not hesitate to name my brother Edgar as heir in my stead."

This turned the discussion to family matters. "Do you have two younger brothers, like I do?" I asked.

"Yes, and one sister."

Since I have no sister, I questioned him further. My parents had been in straitened financial circumstances in the early '40's, and had not enlarged their family further. Such considerations had not governed the family planning of Aelle's parents, nor was birth control either theologically or technologically possible in his world.

"Suppose that John were unmarried, and that you took him back to your time-line," Dan suggested, "and he met your sister. If they were to marry, would that be incest?"

Aelle and I roared with laughter. "That would be a merry question for the clerks," he chuckled. "But are we perchance wed to the same wife in our two worlds?" A few questions established that this was indeed the case: Perdita Anne Boardman is the same as Countess Edith of Wight, daughter of a cadet line of the Kentish royal family. Furthermore, both are five months pregnant.

Subsequent meetings at "The Busted-Rocket" led to further comparisons of our time lines. I was surprised to learn that, while politically and technologically more backwards than our world, Aelle's time-line has some definite advantages. It is a world of turbulent political intrigue, but seems to have had very little religious persecution. Schisms and heresies got started from time to time, but eventually the successors of the heresiarchs seemed to tire of their isolation and return to the fold. The clergy was entirely secular, without monastic orders - "They isolate the clerks from the common folk," as Aelle explained. Trans-Oceanic contact was just beginning in his world, and the nations of India and the Caribbean littoral were not so far behind Europe technically that they could be subjugated as brutally as they were in our time. All of Africa between the Congo and the Kalahari was united under a Xosa dynasty of merchant-kings, and their ships visited Europe quite as often as Irish and Burgundian sails appeared in African waters. All three of these maritime powers were experimenting with steamboats, despite the fact that in 1963 an experimental model had exploded in Antwerpen harbor with great loss of life.

My efforts to find out the state of scientific progress on Aelle's time-line were hampered by the lack of an adequate scientific vocabulary in his version of English. In fact, "natural philosophy" rather than "science" is used for these disciplines in his world. The Copernican theory, to which is attached in that time line the name of one MacWhortor, became generally accepted about 1700. Someone whose name Aelle could not remember had recently put forward a theory of the expanding universe, a surprising thing to find in his relatively backwards world.

Aelle was equally interested in warfare and strategy as it had developed in our world. Highly unreliable cannon and personal firearms are in use in his time-line, though swordplay is still part of a gentleman's education. He approved of the way that war, in our society, is developing away from huge armies of raw draftees and back towards the full-time professional who are the backbone of the South Saxon army.

This is

O At
P Great
E Intervals
R This
A Appears
T To
I Inflammation
O Optic
N Nerves

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