

THE LAST NEVERGATETM C H R O N I C L E S

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Description A Symbolaxis of the Dunnigan
Clanmark by Thodkin Marblemeister

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Background The *Symbol Hobbyist Quarterly* (SHQ) was a modest “journal” of symbolic thought and analysis founded by Calvin “Rosebud” Hobbes in 2041. It was only distributed electronically and content was typically provided by amateur enthusiasts. Quality was regarded by professionals as “spotty at best.” The final known issue was Q4 of 2191, under the editorship of Mirabella Mobutu Castaneda. Pieces by Thodkin Marblemeister appeared at irregular intervals over the entire 150-year life of SHQ, a possible curiosity in itself.

The following article — while somewhat dense and structurally erratic — may be of interest to those who are curious as to the Clans Dunnigan “psyche” and the possible role of their clanmark in nurturing it over the years. And vice versa. Students of graphic marksmanship everywhere may find it a source of rueful chuckles if not illumination. At least the TIA thinks so.

A Symbolaxis of the Dunnigan Clanmark

by Thodkin Marblemeister



Normally, it is my way to introduce myself. While in some circles, I am known, in others I am not, but since this is a science-like citation, I have foregone formal introduction and seek to speed edification by leaping, or jumping — or in some eyes perhaps hopping — directly into my little discussion of the example at hand. That example being, as the title indicates, as I may have stated, or not, a symbolaxis of the Dunnigan clanmark.

A Conspicuous Exception

In a world that has been described as suffering from “symbolic overload”, it is odd that so few families have noteworthy graphic identifiers. Perhaps families, for the most part, have become such thin constructs as to merit no special visual identification. A discussion of family values and their revaluating can be found in a 4,500 page treatise found in the New Turkish Archival Catacombs. The work dates back to the Ottoman Empire and was recreated by tachyon reassembly during the Age of Knowing Reconstruction. But that is another thing altogether and has no place in a paper of this kind. Please just mentally erase the preceding mention of it. Thank you.

So. Contemporary families are uncharacteristically unsymbolic regarding nuclear identifiers. A name spelled out in alphabetic characters is enough. Long gone are the days of family emblems and crests, with their rich, picturesque heraldic symbologies and arcane geometries. A casual survey of noteworthy families of the early twenty-second century finds the so-called Clans Dunnigan and their clanmark (Exhibit 1) to be a conspicuous exception. The present article submits this sigil to a cursory symbolaxis analysis. And if you have any idea what I just said (what you just read) perhaps I should disabuse you in proper form.

By the Numbers

Before beginning our search for meaning within this familiar wheel, let us make some tallies:

- 4 concentric rings, 2 negspace, 2 posspace
- 2 -36 point starbursts, 1 negspace, 1 posspace
- 4 intersecting arcs
- 1 square.

One will be quick to observe that both the numbers “4” and “36” are perfect squares and that the number “36” is also the product of two perfect squares, “9” and “4”. Is there meaning to any of this or is it mere coincidence? As if that weren’t enough, as if it weren’t portentous, as if...what about 3 and 6 adding up to 9, or the obvious 2 times 3 to 6 relationship, or 4 minus 3 = 1 which is the exact difference between the 2 and 3 multipliers. No indeed, the very numbers contributing to the wheel are, well...lets just see if we can agree on this: we shall have to let the numerologists decide.

Origins of the Clanmark

According to the reigning Clans Dunnigan mythology, the idea for a Clan seal was arrived at by all four founders simultaneously: an “aha” moment shared by the original two pairs of identical twins who had just decided upon betrothal and the formation of their own clan. That the design was developed “by committee” is certainly believable: the prosaic symmetry belies professional conception. And it has that innocent earnestness that most professionals seem to eschew these days. Since no designer has ever publicly claimed credit we will let ourselves believe that it was slapped together on a slate one night in mid-2074 by four young engineers enamored of their newfound fourishness. I, being no stranger to a tale, do enjoy this good story: so I rarely produce, nor in fact even seek, disputation. Deconstruction, on quite the other hand, may yield value.

Deconstruction and Revelation

Unlike many traditional seals, crests, shields, emblems, chops, sigils and similar graphic devices, the Dunnigan clanmark employs purely geometrical symbolism as opposed to pictorial symbolism. Stylistically, the overall clanmark aesthetic has more in common with design motifs from feudal Japan than modern commercial identity design. Beginning in the eleventh century and continuing for nearly a millennium, family crests were an inseparable component of Japanese formal apparel, a custom that began to fade only in the early twentieth century. The Dunnigan clanmark echoes this tradition. And a poignant tradition it is for me, having been there myself and worn those wonderful richly colored silks painted with stylized gold and silver dragons and cherry trees and pastoral articulations. It was a time when “well-dressed” had meaning. Again an aside: please ignore it.

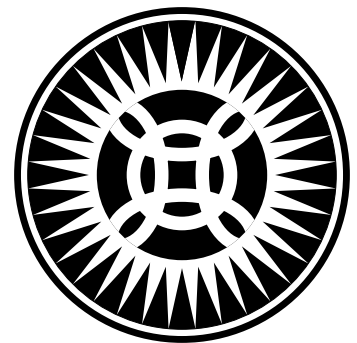


EXHIBIT 1
The illustrious Dunnigan clanmark in all its black and white radiance.

At first glance, the raw Dunnigan clanmark is dominated by the 36-point negspace starburst (or sunburst, depending on which term one prefers). On closer inspection it can be seen that the posspace containing the starburst forms an inversion of 36 points that appear to converge like a ring of shark teeth upon the central circular motif (a metaphor we will discuss later). Both negative and positive starbursts are contained by narrow concentric rings of posspace and negspace. Self evident, but worth noting, as more science of surprise follows.



The symmetrical pretzel-like motif contained by the posspace ring inside the negspace starburst is similar at first glance to a concentrically-snipped cloverleaf, not unlike the cloverleaf symbol that was ubiquitous through its appearance on ancient Apple computer keyboards. The Apple cloverleaf is a symbol of some antiquity and has been seen as a design motif in feudal Japanese and pre-Christian Norse imagery, among other places. It was once used on road signs in one of the Euronats (Sweden, if the memory lingers correctly) to mark sites of historical interest. A similar design is also sometimes referred to as “St. Hannes’ cross” and various four-lobed cloverleaf forms are used in Celtic, Irish and Scottish designs. There is also a cursory similarity to variations on the classic “treasure knot” form, although the Dunnigan form is truncated on its ends. With each paragraph I build toward the obvious. Perhaps others undervalue road signs, negspace and pospace. Folly.

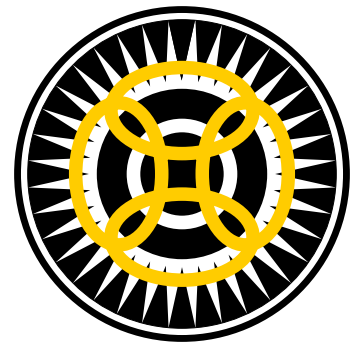


EXHIBIT 2
The clanmark “cloverleaf” deconstructed. Its origin is revealed as a series of linked ellipses (shown in yellow here for clarity).

All such similarities aside, the Dunnigan motif, upon close inspection, is not merely lifted from any of these forms. The motif is formed of what first appear to be four identical negspace arcs positioned at ninety degree intervals and intersecting two other arcs. The innermost concentric ring of the mark links all four arcs. The intersection of the arcs also creates a negspace geometric figure at the very center which resolves into a square.

Exhibit 2 reveals the source of the four arcs to be four ellipses truncated by the negspace circle which defines and constrains the inner motif and upon which is superimposed the negspace starburst. Grok that?

Possible Symbolic Intentions

For many decades, and I know this better than most, it has been unfashionable to imbue identity designs with meaning to any great depth. Professional designers —for the most part justifiably so — have come to believe that to burden a graphic device at the outset with qualitative symbolism can only be an expression of arch hypocrisy. And the various publics would hardly disagree. “Let the mark earn its sense,” says Hyrus Komarzian, Design Fellow at Marz, Komarzian, Hoffelt and Cook, an image consultancy of some repute. This has been the

way of things for nearly two centuries. Still, it is likely that the original Dunnigans did, in fact, deploy the design elements for symbolic intent. We can only guess at the symbolic intentions of the First Four, but guess we shall. Were they aware that I had been forced to remove nearly all symbolism from my story telling? Were they making amends, shifting the balance? It seems possible to me, though formal evidence has not been forthcoming.

Starbursts — The first four Dunnigans have never been shy about their ambitions. In the early years of the Clans (and, we may safely assume, of Dunnetix LLC as well) they verbalized their intent to be a spark of biogenetic innovation. Later, they saw themselves more broadly as a creative force for the good and growth of humanity. Still later, they saw themselves as creators of new evolutionary pathways for homo sapiens and, if Wyvern Project is any signal, they were lighting themselves up, beaconing as the creators of entire new species themselves. Thus we can interpret the negspace starburst as the illuminative and creative force emanating from the united power at the clannish core (the “source”). This conforms to many traditional interpretations of the starburst points as “rays of creation.”

The obverse of the starburst may be equally telling: 36 posspace knife points targeted at the source. While the Dunnigans decline to reveal their symbolic intentions, the defensive power of unity is one of the central purposes of any clan. All for one and one for all. Live together and die together. It takes two to tango and four to double-tango. Watchwords and mantras fertilized by obsessive clan unity (“clannity” in the Dunnigan private vocab, or so I’m told).

Circles — Lacking beginning or end, the circle has been endlessly deployed with symbolic intent. It most often has represented such notions as infinity, totality, wholeness, perfection, simultaneity, eternity, timelessness and sex. It is not hard to imagine the First Four, in their youthful exuberance, construing their visions for the Clans in such terms. The fact that the clanmark contains four concentric circles — two in negspace, two in posspace — may or may not be a reference to the number of the founders.

Square — The negspace square at the core of the clanmark may also have symbolic intentions. At a surficial level, the four sides may have simply represented the paired males and females in perfect equality and balance. More subtle interpretations may also be possible. In Pythagorean symbology, for example, the square represents the soul: as the intellectual, motivational and, in a modern sense at least, the spiritual guiding force behind Clan activities and accomplishments, the four original Dunnigans are, in fact, the living soul of the Clans. In



Hindu mythology, the square represents the balance of opposites and the stability and solidity resulting therefrom. This would seem a comfortable symbolic fit with several aspects of First Four-ness. And one can notice that circles are informed by an infinite number of squares rotated an infinite division of 360 degrees alluding to a synchronicity between the totality and supreme balance. Or, possibly clanmarks are more abstract.

Central Figure — If we were to call the central figure a clipped cloverleaf, it would be simple to presume that it symbolized good luck: the four-lobed cloverleaf has been widely used as a good luck portent, particularly by the old Irish. And certainly the First Four had more than their share of good luck, their fabled evening with the Arms of Fortune being a prime example. But, as we have seen in Exhibit 2, the central figure is constructed of four linked ellipses or ovals, an entirely different process from the formation of the cloverleaf symbol. Ovals are most often symbolically associated with either femaleness or the so-called Cosmic Egg, a core notion in Egyptian mythology. This may seem apropos in light of their practice of “tiering” Dunnigan generations: one hundred podborn offspring at a time is certainly “cosmically eggish” if we can take a small conceptual liberty or two. However, the fact that the central figure is constructed of four intersecting ovals makes a purely female symbolic intent problematic. Similarly, since the ovals/ellipses are represented only in their outlines, the Cosmic Egg symbology seems equally suspect: this would give us the empty symbolic equivalent of mere Cosmic Eggshells. More likely in the case of the clanmark, the central Figure represents a closed chain of four links, perhaps a symbolic comment on the strength of the bond joining the First Four to each other. And were they Irish? Sometime later may be discovered the truth of the lineage. I don’t mean to begin rumorizing, fabricating for sensation, but I would like to hear the question asked. What is known about their Irish lineage? And do they sprinkle clover on their WittGrits?

The fact that the chainistic origins of the Central Figure are concealed by other aspects of the clanmark may symbolize the existence of hidden or mysterious (mysterious in spiritual sense) knowledge or secrets. One would not find this interpretation to be a great leap of believability considering what is known of Clans Dunnigan secretiveness. Further, the illusion of “openness” of the Central Figure is just that: an illusion. Perhaps this is a subconscious indicator of — if we dare say it — ruthless adherence to Clans Dunnigan purposes by its members.

Colors

Exhibit 3 depicts the clanmark in its official colors: red, white, violet. As colors, it would be difficult to pick a trio of more potent overall



EXHIBIT 3
The clanmark rendered in its “official” colors. Stern? Forceful? Domineering? Maybe. Certainly not playful or besotted with whimsy.

import. It stresses my crinkly graymatter to imagine this combination being selected by four novices around a kitchen table. One suspects a copy of Bontifex was consulted during color selection. Red: the color of life, blood, energy, war, Mars and, of course, Jupiter, the ruler of the Roman pantheon. White: transcendent perfection, purity, light, sun, air, illumination. Violet: intelligence, knowledge, sobriety; combines the power and authority of red with the wisdom of blue.

There's more. Red and violet bracket the visual spectrum in an all-encompassing embrace: beyond them are only infra and ultra. How's that for power symbology? Or the little tidbit that white is either all or nothing, depending on how one likes to view such things. No half-full/half-empty nonsense for these Dunnigans. No indeed.

Aha, you say! But are red, white and violet really the Dunnigan colors? What about all the pollution of these colors through lax enforcement of color standards? Well, you might have a point. Those of us who have visited North Castle can find the clanmark rendered in just about every color scheme imaginable (Exhibit 4 is one of dozens of such instances). Still, in formal settings (the clanbanner is a certifiable example) it is always rendered in red, white and violet...or in monochrome. One suspects that this apparent dichotomy may actually be an element of strategy: Clans policy may well have decided to separate "power" uses and "casual" uses, making those fewer (and selective) applications of the "true colors" seem to have all the power and impact of an invading army of crack Securitans. Think about it, as I have. Consult other sources and you will end right back here knowing only as much as I have disclosed.

Symbolic Evolution

An applicable truism is that symbols evolve over time. Events and historical context shape the way they are perceived far more than their raw form. The case of the swastika is ample proof. An ancient symbol, its two basic forms (often seen as male and female) have been found in many prehistoric cultures around the globe and at least one which has been seen in parallax worlds accessed by Nevergate. On Earth, the swastika has historically been associated with good luck, blessings, longevity, health and life. The twentieth century Germans under the Nazi Party managed to recast this perception (at least to non-Nazis) to become a symbol of fear, evil and death, leading in the end to being understood as a symbol (dare I use the word?) of giddy, ingrown, overpercolated, selfimportant intellectual buffoonery used for heinous intent. Need I say more?

How has the Dunnigan clanmark fared over the five decades since the Clans and Dunnetix first carved their initials in the public psyche?



EXHIBIT 4
A portion of woven wallhanging in one of the North Castle guestrooms featuring one of numerous "nonstandard" color renditions of the clanmark.

The Clans have always been perceived as eccentric at a minimum. The blooms of busybody outrage at their 100-kids-at-a-time clanbuilding strategy is an obvious example. But it quickly took a media backseat to other antics. Early on was the success of Dunnetix' PuppyVac and other popular products. And then the building of Dunnigans Wall and the twin mirror-castles. One thing after another kept them in the public eye as a new form of outrageous "team" celebrity. One almost thinks that Madonna 13 keeps egging them on. Forget I said that: hardly radical enough to even mention. More like having an illegal clone of Hunter S. Thompson chained in a closet somewhere to provide them with outrageous hype-fodder. Forget I said that, as well. Have you forgotten yet?

But let's be fair for a moment, shall we? The Nevers intelligences along with the marvels spawned by them, including, in particular, the Ucey, the Nevergate and Refurberator have justifiably earned the Clans much glory, despite the fact that many innovations were under non-Dunnetix sponsorship. Not hype, these. Further, their not-infrequent confrontations with always-unpopular WorldGov have given them spikes of Cultural Hero stature, something rarely accorded corporate leaders. And, they've been clever enough to never run for public office.

This is not to say the Clans and their clanmark haven't seen spikes of unpopularity, as well. A decade ago, the Wyvern Project was seen as scandalous and anti-human, but outcries soon died down when nothing too fearful materialized. This year's "murder" of an attacking human by a wyvern, however, has brought out the placard-wavers again along with a spike of surprisingly anti-Dunnigan mood. Why is that? Bathtubs are far more dangerous than wyverns. Will the outcry last? Doubtful. Dunnigans are so powerful and so entwined in the Nevergate era as to be almost woven into the fabric of this planet. In a way, the Dunnigan clanmark transcends the sort of symbolic componentry that we attempt in a symbolaxis: it has become, like a cross or a swastika or a yinyang or golden arches, a thing that is totally of itself. As such, it just may outlast the Dunnigans themselves. If you want to interpret that as prophecy, please do so.

Until called upon again, to yield precise analysis, formal and science-like...T.M.

