

*Of everything I've written, the following piece has generated by far the most response. I'm glad. It's one of those stories that took a couple of years to write, as different puzzle parts fell into place. There were a couple of things I didn't try to include in the published article (which first appeared in a magazine for land surveyors) or the radio show. For one, it was really odd how information came to me about this. For example, the occult book mentioned (it is alarmingly titled, *Conjuring Spirits*) practically jumped out at me from a bookstore shelf and opened in my hands to the Kaballah square that began to tie everything together. Another, weirder, happenstance had to do with my study of a classic 'master' conspiracy theory known as the *Sirius Mystery*, and centering on a book of that title by Robert Temple, and also on an underground bestseller by über conspiracy theorist Robert Anton Wilson titled *Cosmic Trigger*. The basic idea of the *Sirius Mystery* is that beings from the Sirius star system visited several ancient civilizations to jumpstart human technology, while also providing the magickal basis for every conspiracy since, from the Knights Templar to the Priory of Sion (don't ask). Naturally, they are in psychic contact with some humans, and intend to return fairly soon...*

*Anyway, Wilson's book mentioned that he and two other writers, Doris Lessing and Phillip K. Dick, all wrote books about aliens from Sirius at more or less the same time, and without having any contact each other. I'd read Dick's book, and decided to read Lessing's, *Shikasta*. It's a good read, but most notable for me was one of the book's concluding passages, which described **the gridded look of the sectionalized United States and attributed it to the evil 'Shikasta' influence!** It was an odd moment; two separate conspiracy type thingies that I had been studying and thinking and talking about obsessively for more than a year suddenly and unexpectedly came together with a bang. For a couple of days, the world was a different place for me.*

*I've been asked if I 'believe' in the sectional conspiracy. I'm not sure how to answer. I certainly believe in the facts presented. Do I believe that a secretive group cast a Kabbalistic magick spell over the developing United States? Or do I think, rather, that I have just found a clever way to map odd information onto an exceedingly complicated topic. I don't know. And I can't figure out what the difference is between the two possibilities.*

# Sectional Strangeness



One of the problems with *not* being a conspiracy theorist is that one has no easy explanations when faced with some of the more glaring oddities of the world around us. It is, for example, passing strange that the dollar bill features an all-seeing eye and pyramid and the fact that it *can* be explained does not mean that it *has* been explained, if you follow my drift. Similarly, the non-conspiracy theorist is forced into some fancy mental gymnastics when considering glaringly obvious phenomena, such as the presence of two Skull-and-Bonesmen in the 2004 presidential election, the screwy layout of Washington D.C., and the pentagonal shape of the world's most powerful military headquarters. Mundane explanations exist for all of these, but since they are bizarre facts to begin with, the mind is more comfortable with bizarre explanations involving the Illuminati, aliens, or the occult.

My own personal example of this began one morning when I was considering the Public Lands Survey System (PLSS) township layout, the 6x6 boustrephedonic square made up of 36 square mile 'sections'. 'Boustrephedonic', incidentally, is the word for the right-to-left, left-to-right layout of the square – it's from the Greek, and means 'as an ox plows' and in this case describes the descending, switchbacking layout of the square - see the illustration. I've always wondered about the township layout; why, for instance, is it boustrephedonic, and why is it 6x6, and not some other number? Idly, I added up the columns and rows, to see if there were any 'magic square' properties in the design. The columns all add up to 111 – try it yourself. A little experimentation showed that this is a feature of boustrephedonic squares with even, but not odd, numbered sides, so this is not mysterious. The rows, on the

other hand, seemed to yield no pattern of interest... until I took one more step. I 'reduced' the numbers numerologically to yield a single digit number. That is, I added together the digits of the multi-digit numbers, and if the result was multi-digit I added again until a one digit number resulted. As seen below, the numerological sum of all the rows is three, and it takes no special flash of insight to see that the numerological sum of 111, the column sum, is *also* three. Curious.

6	5	4	3	2	1	$1+2+3+4+5+6 = 21, 2+1 = 3$
7	8	9	10	11	12	$= 57, 5+7 = 12, 1+2 = 3$
18	17	16	15	14	13	$= 93, 9+3 = 12, 1+2 = 3$
19	20	21	22	23	24	$= 129, 1+2+9 = 12, 1+2 = 3$
30	29	28	27	26	25	$= 165, 1+6+5 = 12, 1+2 = 3$
31	32	33	34	35	36	$= 201, 2+0+1 = 3$

All columns add up to 111,  $1+1+1 = 3$

I should say, here, that I am not much of a numerologist. I don't work out year numbers, or look for numerological significance in the dates of my life. Still, I did read a book about it once, and took away numerological reduction as a sort of 'mental fidgeting.' And number mysticism has a history in the West that goes all the way back to Pythagoras and his followers. Many great minds have succumbed, and the results are not always pretty. Isaac Newton, for example, spent at least as much time on numerical Biblical exegesis as he did on scientific work and his writings on those topics strike modern readers as deranged. Two modern movies, *Pi* and *A Beautiful Mind* explore the tendency of the mind to project numerological meaning onto complex phenomena.

Be that as it may and ignoring, for the moment, the possibility that *I* was succumbing to number mysticism, the undeniable fact remained that the GLO township is a numerological magic square. I worked out boustrephedonic squares from 2x2 to 9x9, and *only* the 6x6 square has this property.

So; now what? Well, not having all that many facts at hand, I immediately began to theorize. Eventually, I came up with rather an elaborate scenario involving Thomas Jefferson, the Illuminati, and aerial photography – it was good for at least 20 minutes of happy hour conversation. But, upon investigation, the hypothesis broke down. Jefferson, for example, preferred a 10x10 square and there is no evidence of Illuminati involvement... but then, there wouldn't be, would there? So I began to tire of the whole thing; not that I disbelieved my nutty theory, necessarily, but I began to bore even myself.

### Kaballah?

Two actual facts got me interested again. First, when reading a book about the Jewish system of mysticism known as Kaballah (or Cabala, or Qaballah, or any of several variants – take your pick) I happened across the following figure.

6	32	3	34	35	1
7	11	27	28	8	30
19	14	16	15	23	24
18	20	22	21	17	13
25	29	10	9	26	12
36	5	33	4	2	31

Kaballah magic square - every row and column adds up to 111, which reduces numerologically to 3. Since the 6th sephiroth of the Kaballistic Tree of Life is associated with the Sun, this 6x6 square is also associated with the Sun.

It turns out that conventional magic squares are important in Kaballah, and are associated with the planets and astrological magic. The 6x6 square is associated with the sun, and is therefore the most powerful of these. One text of Western Occultism (for which Kaballah is a major source), dating from the 1400s, says of it, “The figure of the Sun is appropriated for kings and princes of this world, and it is square and has a grid of six, and it is the figure of *total power*.”

Now, I only sort of believe in astrological magic, or rather, I’m learning to suspend judgement about the exotic belief systems of others, but it is a fact that humans have apparently *always* used the progressions of the night sky for mystical purposes, and after 1,000’s of years, astrology very much remains part of our world – something about it is irresistibly seductive to some human minds. And interestingly, amazing feats of engineering have a long association with astronomy and astrology. The Pyramids, of course, and Stonehenge, are just two of the many examples of major ancient accomplishments which are now believed to have been largely motivated by astrological concerns. But considered as a whole, the township system is this planet’s most significant man made feature – it would swallow thousands of Great Walls. It is easily visible from space. Which leads to the rather strange thought that future archaeologists, investigating the wonder that was America, will uncover the whole system of townships and naturally conclude that early Americans were determined to stamp the ‘figure of the Sun’ across the entire Continent – and nearly succeeded.

### **An Apocalyptic Sun**

I’ll admit, I could have done without the second actual fact that got me interested again in township oddities. Late in 2003, after I had been musing about these things for a couple of years, I was looking again at a township layout (they were, after all, a major feature of my job) and suddenly wondered

what the numbers 1 through 36 add up to. That is, what is the sum of the 36 township squares? I've learned since that there's an easy way to sum up long series of numbers, but I didn't know it at the time so I just took out my trusty Hewlett Packard and cranked out an answer. Then, hoping I'd made a mistake, I added them up again... and then I did it one more time just to be sure. The sum is - and some of you are probably way ahead of me here - 666, also known as "The Number of the Beast".

*Here is the key; and anyone who has intelligence may work out the number of the beast. The number represents a man's name, and the numerical value of its letters is six hundred and sixty-six. - Revelation 13:18, New English Bible*

### Now What?

To sum up then, the GLO township is a unique numerological magic square, very similar to squares associated with Kaballah and used in Western Occultism for hundreds of years. In a major feat of engineering, it has been stamped across much of the United States. The sum of its individual squares is 666, a number of apocalyptic significance to many.

Now what is the poor non-conspiracy theorist to do, faced with such a rich source of peculiarity? Probably the best thing to do is to ignore such rabbit holes, but instead I began to wonder about possible motivations. That is, if there *were* some shadowy group behind all this, what might their motives have been?

Because the GLO square has definitely had a major effect on the United States, quite aside from its impact on surveying. Fly over the United States, or look at aerial photos. You will see a grid, a chessboard; square fields or developed blocks bounded by straight roads. No other sector of the Earth is

laid out like this. Fly over any part of Europe, or Asia, or South America, or... anywhere but here, really. You will see roads and fields that follow contours, that give way to hills and mountains, that nestle up to forest edges and creeks. You will see a human landscape that is *shaped by* the natural world; but in the United States, most of us live in a landscape that is *imposed upon* the natural world, laid over it like graph paper on a map. The township system is part of the structural underpinning of U.S. culture, part of every American's mental furniture. It may not be, quite, the air we breathe but it is certainly the ground we walk on. It shapes our visible world and it shapes us.

Is it too crazy, too speculative, to say that Americans are a different people as a result of our different environment, that our national culture is partially a product of our national landscape? As a nation, we do tend to ride roughshod, at times, over the natural world. Could our straight roads and square fields be shaping us as much as we shape them?

Now here I speculate wildly, but bear with me. One word for the tendency to impose order on nature is 'Apollonian'. The sun god, Apollo, has long been associated with classical order, control, discipline and masculinity – as opposed to the Moon Goddess, traditionally associated with wildness, paganism, and femininity. As a nation, the United States is considerably more 'solar' than 'lunar'.

But since the 6x6 square is a solar device, a fascinating (and, yes, nutty and conspiratorial) possibility comes to mind. There is the interesting, unlikely, crazy possibility that some person or group manipulated the choice of GLO township layout in an attempt to cast a Kabbalistic spell over an entire nation... and there is the possibility that it worked.