

Confronting problems of Planet Pluto

By J B Leftwich

"Subduction leads to Orogeny," according to a bumper sticker noticed by grandson Andy Newton who sent the teaser to me via email.

I hadn't the vaguest notion what these words meant. I wonder if Andy knew without referring to a dictionary. I didn't know. Even Spell Check didn't know how to spell "Orogeny," so I turned to a dictionary.

As titillating as the words appear, this is not a catch-phrase for a "butts and boobs" television commercial. There is no sexual connotation. It's deep stuff everybody should learn.

"Subduction" defines the movement of the tectonic plates which form the crust of Planet Earth. "Orogeny" means the formation of mountains. Understanding the definitions translated into understanding the sticker. When two tectonic plates collide and one overlaps the other, a mountain is formed.

In response, I wrote "Triton's Orbit is Retrograde."

It is, you know. The only moon in our solar system which rotates clockwise. Triton's existence was not known until late in the Twentieth Century when the planet Pluto was discovered with its unconventional moon.

In case you failed to etch this bit of data in your memory bank, counterclockwise is considered a positive direction. Clockwise is considered a negative you get the drift

It seems the inventor of the clock, whoever that was, made a mistake. The hands should have rotated in the opposite direction to be in harmony with nature, and with many of man's inventions. Even the Cartesian coordinates of high school mathematics fame are framed for counterclockwise motion as a positive direction;

So there is poor little Pluto, the planet most remote from the sun whose existence is a recent discovery and a rebellious moon that rotates in a motion opposite from all other moons of all other planets in our solar system.

It gives you pause, I think. How is it that the smallest planet whose existence was unknown throughout most of the history of our world has a contrary moon which insists on defying convention?

Swimming in a vast sea of ignorance as I am, I have no clue as to how positive direction is determined in space. Somewhere there has to be a point of reference. If you are on the other side of Pluto where man has never been, would it appear Pluto's little old moon is rotating counterclockwise and all other moons of all other planets are the rebels as they

rotate clockwise?

Maybe the thinkers of our planet have solved this dilemma. But most folks don't know. Dr. G. Frank Burns who knows something about everything probably knows, but I haven't seen him since the subject came up. The folks at NASA probably know, but they are concentrating on what went wrong with their shuttle crafts and not enlightening us on the rotation of Pluto's moon.

More people should concentrate on this puzzler. Earth would be much better off if our thinkers, our shakers and our movers focused their minds on Triton instead of whatever they focus their minds on. You think I am exercising the absurd?

Well, consider this: If Saddam had concentrated on the puzzle of Pluto's moon instead of becoming the despot of Iraq and the nemesis of the Bush administration, would the USA be spending billions in an over heated desert?

Probably so. If Saddam had not risen to power in Iraq, likely some other Iraqi would have filled the vacuum. There is always somebody waiting to answer the call when a despot is needed.

Back on Pluto, there is no despot, no dictator, no budget deficits, no war, no reality shows on Plutonian television, no liberals, no conservatives. Sounds sort of inviting until you consider the harsh reality in a hostile environment and remember the Plutonians are not bothering us and we should mind our own business which on Planet Earth is hard for us to do.

Borrowing from the signature phrase of Garrison Kielor's Lake Woebegon sign-off, that's how it is on Planet Pluto where the moon is unique, orogeny is oblique and no child is left behind.

(J.B. Leftwich is a veteran journalist and a columnist for *The Lebanon Democrat*. Email: leftwichjb@charter.net)

<http://www.ajlambert.com>