SEVEN AND THIRTEEN

DAVE MORICE
Iowa City, Iowa
drABC26@aol.com

As the superstitious know for a fact and the substitious deny as mere superstition, the numbers 7 and 13 influence our lives far more than any other number lower than a googol. They are the Yin-Yang of Fortune, the Comedy and Tragedy of Kismet, the Abbott and Costello of Fate, the Sweet and Sour Sauce of Destiny. We avoid 13. Many buildings have no 13th floor, many weeks have no Friday the 13th. We embrace 7. All weeks have 7 days, all rainbows have 7 colors, all octaves have 7 different musical notes. There are 7 wonders of the world, and the world has 7 seas. We thank our lucky stars that there are 12 months in the year instead of 13. We consider it bad luck to be behind the 8-ball instead of the 7-ball. And yet there are some puzzling contradictions. We speak of Seventh Heaven as well as the Seven Circles of Hell (not to mention the Seven Deadly Sins). We rarely consider the mathological or logomathical truths connecting 7 and 13 in labyrinthine complexity. As with sins, octaves, destiny, 8-balls and Costello, perhaps there are secrets waiting to be revealed. Perhaps the lucky and the unlucky numbers are two sides of the same coin, two faces of the same Eve, two mirrors reflecting each other...

In this essay, we restrict ourselves to the properties of these two number names: can one discover properties analogous to the ones developed by us for the number names under 100 (Word Ways, Nov 1998)?

SEVEN and THIRTEEN are the first two two-syllable number names.

The sum of 7 and 13 is TWENTY, the letter values of which are 20,23,5,14,20,25. Viewed as a string of eleven digits, the first four add to 7 and the first six add to 13; furthermore, the last two add to 7 and the last five add to 13.

Divide the sum of the letter values of SEVEN (65) by the number of letters in SEVEN (5) to get 13. Divide the reversed sum of the letter values of SEVEN (56) by the number of letters in THIRTEEN (8) to get 7.

The letter values of SEVEN and THIRTEEN are 19,5,22,2,14 and 20,8,9,18,20,5,5,14.
Add the value of T, the first letter of THIRTEEN, to the value of S, the first letter of SEVEN; and reduce the answer by 26: 20 + 19 = 39, 39 - 26 = 13.
Add the value of H, the second letter of THIRTEEN, to the value of E, the second letter of SEVEN: 8 + 5 = 13.
Subtract the value of I, the third letter of THIRTEEN, from the value of V, the third letter of SEVEN: 22 - 9 = 13.
Subtract the value of R, the fourth letter of THIRTEEN, from the value of E, the fourth letter of SEVEN, and increase the answer by 26: 5 - 18 = -13, -13 + 26 = 13.
Note that all four possibilities have been used: add vs. subtract, modify the answer by 26 vs. let the answer stand as is.

There are three more ways that the answer 13 can be achieved, by selecting letter values of non-corresponding letters in THIRTEEN and SEVEN. Add the value of the fourth letter of SEVEN (5) to the value of the second letter of THIRTEEN (8), subtract the value of the fourth letter of THIRTEEN (18) from the value of the second letter of SEVEN (5); and add the value of the first letter of SEVEN (19) to the value of the fifth letter of THIRTEEN (20). All three equations lead to 13, and in fact there are seven (and only seven) such equations possible!

In contrast, there is only one way to produce the answer 7: add 19, the value of the first letter in SEVEN, to 14, the value of the last letter in THIRTEEN, to obtain 19 + 14 which, reduced by 26, equals 7. I've never found such a strange, delicate and complex occurrence of numerical wordplay as the seven equations whose mod-26 sums or differences equal 13.

ODES FROM THE ODD TOPICS SOCIETY

Howard G. Baetzhold, P.L.O.T.S.
Indianapolis, Indiana

Butler's Odd Topics Society meets every now and then to discuss Odd Topics of any nature. Professor Baetzhold is the Poet Laureate Odd Topics Society.

Ode to Otis the Dodo

A marvelous bird is the Dodo;
He looks something like Quasimodo.
But though clumsy and ugly, he's true blue,
And probably knows more than you do.

Fit mascot for our Society,
Our Otis is not known for piety,
He favors all knowledge impractical,
And scorns what is largely syntactical.

So praise and all hail to you, Otis!
If you walked down the street who would notice?
We would, that's who would, as you know,
P'haps 'cause we all are part dodo!

H.G.B. P.L.O.T.S
Poet Laureate Odd Topics Society