

unsubscribe Digest urth.v017.n002

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 17 Jul 1998

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Internet Megantic — 17 Jul 1998, 16:19

At 15:10 15-07-98 -0700, you wrote:

----- BEGIN urth.v017.n002 -----

001 - raster at highfiber.com (Cha - Digest Urth, or brains thereof)
002 - Dan Parmenter <dan at lec.co - Hethor's robot love-doll
003 - Michael Straight <straigh - Re: (urth) Digest Urth, or brains thereof
004 - "Mark Millman" <Mark_Mill - Re: (urth) Digest Urth, or brains thereof
005 - mary whalen <marewhalen@y - (urth) French Wolfe sites
006 - Michael Straight <straigh - Re: (urth) Hues, HORARS: II

URTH Digest -- for discussion of Gene Wolfe's New Sun and other works

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n002.1 -----

From: raster at highfiber.com (Charles Dye)
Subject: Digest Urth, or brains thereof
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 1998 15:57:05 -0600 (MDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

adam louis stephanides <astephan at students.uiuc.edu> explicates:

raster argued that, as long as Severian was still alive or if he'd been lost at sea, nobody could be a legitimate Autarch. It's not clear to me whether this is because a legitimate Autarch must eat his predecessor's brains ...

Such an ugly phrase, that. Can't we come up with some polite euphemism? "Breakfast for your head" ... no, wait, I like "eating brains" better. Never mind. Yes, that was my point: you need a body for succession to proceed.

... or simply that a legitimate Autarch must be chosen by his predecessor. If the former, it would seem that the Autarchy runs a grave risk of being permanently lost, either through the Autarch being captured by the enemy, or killed in battle or by assassination with the designated successor unable to arrive in time.

But note that ol' Appian has been captured by the enemy! It's made pretty clear that Severian is the "designated successor," but I'm not certain that there always is one. Alls ya needs is a corpse, a knife, and the drug -- all provided by Appian -- and instructions, which presumably Inire would have provided had A been unable to. The next-in-line may be a randomly chosen bystander, if you don't have a designated successor handy.

(You'll notice that after Appian's injury and capture, Inire can be seen skulking about. Severian thinks he's trying to carry out a rescue. Fat chance -- Appian's as good as dead. I believe Inire is there to ensure the continued dynasty.)

That said, yes, the regime does have some problems. It also has a few advantages. Fr'instance, it's easy to decide whether or not an individual claiming the Autarchy is the real McCoy. He knows the words!

m.driussi at genie.com writes:

Actually I believe raster's primary concern re: authentic autarchs is the same as my own--the brain eating bit. It seems to define "autarch" as distinct from "monarch," "suzerain," "dictator of the proletariat," etc.; it also seems to figure into the equation of "how one person can represent many" in a concrete way rather than just the lip-service paid by representative democracy. The autarch =is= legion--it isn't just a metaphor.

And also provides a slick justification for the royal plural.

So yes, yes, very rickety. I imagine Inire stepping out of the shadows to help along a situation that requires a deus ex machina to deliver a brain-eater--that is, Inire won't allow the system to fail; the autarch breaks his neck, a scullary maid becomes Autarch.

Or a honey steward, of course.

mary whalen -- well, okay, prion -- notes:

Has anyone noticed that the Autarch Appian's name is a homophone for apian (bee-like)? Any connection with the Honey Steward?

Bingo! Name pun -- Wolfe loves 'em. Also, of course, another Claudian reference.

raster at highfiber.com

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n002.2 -----

From: Dan Parmenter <dan at lec.com>
Subject: Hethor's robot love-doll
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 1998 15:08:21 -0700 (PDT)

From: m.driussi at genie.com

Or as Ranjit put it (and I paraphrase): Hethor lusts after Agia because she's so Korean. :)

I thought he just missed his paracoita :-)

Can Jolenta love anyone? Didn't we once assume that there was something of Norma Jean Desmond (Marilyn Monroe) in her too?

D

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n002.3 -----

From: Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>
Subject: Re: (urth) Digest Urth, or brains thereof
Date: Wed, 15 Jul 1998 11:17:07 -0400 (EDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII
In-Reply-To: <199807142159.OAA23796 at lists1.best.com>

On Tue, 14 Jul 1998, Charles Dye wrote:

That said, yes, the regime does have some problems. It also has a few advantages. Fr'instance, it's easy to decide whether or not an individual claiming the Autarchy is the real McCoy. He knows the words!

I have to admit some confusion on that point. Wouldn't anyone judging the Autarch also have to know the words in order to recognize them? Shouldn't any such person be able to speak "the words" and pose as the Autarch?

Are they perhaps some sort of hypnotic triggers that people recognize but are unable to remember?

-Rostrum

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n002.4 -----

From: "Mark Millman" <Mark_Millman at hmco.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Digest Urth, or brains thereof
Date: Wed, 15 Jul 1998 12:04:38 -0400
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii
Content-Disposition: inline

On Wednesday 15 July 1998, Rostrum wrote:

On Tue, 14 Jul 1998, Charles Dye wrote:

That said, yes, the regime does have some problems. It also has a few advantages. Fr'instance, it's easy to decide whether or not an individual claiming the Autarchy is the real McCoy. He knows the words!

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-Rostrum

This seems entirely possible, though if I recall (and you've all just had a taste of how bad my memory can be) we're really given no evidence of how the castellan of the Citadel reacts to Severian's word of command--whether, that is, he jumps to an implanted compulsion or simply recognizes the password, as it were (ignoring the possibility you raise, Rostrum, that he recognizes a word that deliberately has been made unavailable to his conscious mind, which I'd call a special case of the latter situation).

However, I don't think this is an insuperable obstacle. For one thing, many of the words command mechanical contrivances, so all a putative Autarch would have to do, for example, would be to open the door behind the throne and maybe operate a couple of other devices to prove his or her legitimacy. Or the words of command for three or four subordinates could be employed; even if the officers are consciously aware of their passwords, they may only be inherited, so to speak, in the line of succession for each office. The person who knows several must therefore be the Autarch.

Or (and to me this seems most likely) Inire, who seems to be as ubiquitous as flan in Spanish restaurants, could assert the legitimacy of each successor based either on his having witnessed the essential act of succession or on a test of the individual in question. It seems as though he must know a great many, if not all, of the words of power; and one would think him, in this context at least, to be for all practical purposes incorruptible.

Mark Millman

----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n002.5 -----

From: mary whalen <marewhalen at yahoo.com>
Subject: (urth) French Wolfe sites
Date: Wed, 15 Jul 1998 12:03:05 -0700 (PDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

This is Sean Whalen (prion).

Thanks, Dan. I also found a large site at www.mygale.org/~lemonon/Teur/teur.html, if anyone's interested in seeing it.

prion

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----- MESSAGE urth.v017.n002.6 -----

From: Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>
Subject: Re: (urth) Hues, HORARS: II
Date: Wed, 15 Jul 1998 17:15:54 -0400 (EDT)
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII
In-Reply-To: <199807142008.NAA20369 at lists1.best.com>

On Tue, 14 Jul 1998, Robert Borski wrote:

HORARS is an updated Golem story (which basically Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN also is). As God has done with us, so have we humans done with the Homolog ORGANisms (Army Replacement Simulations). But whereas God has created us in His image out of love, we create the HORARS for less noble reasons. We certainly don't love them; in fact there's evidence most ordinary humans revile them. But if it's a choice between us dying in combat with the Enemy or the HORARS, hey, we'll gladly let them be our corporal stand-ins, i.e., the HORARS are bodies only (whores), fit only for acting out our vile needs. (We're their puppeteers, as we are Pinocchios, the robot tank.)

[...]

In fact, both stories seem to be cautionary tales about the ill-advisedness of tampering with nature, especially in regards to eugenics and attempting to improve on God's greatest creation, you, me and all the rest of our fellow Homo sapiens--hardly surprising caveats from a writer of Gene Wolfe's Catholicity.

HORARS seems to me to be more fundamentally yet another example of one of Wolfe's favorite themes, the narrator who doesn't know who or what he is, and who is ignorant of his true role in the world. I suppose this is also a pretty Christian theme--that fallen humans don't know who they are, don't know the story they are a part of.

I think the irony of the narrator's pretending to be something he already is (does the text leave open the possibility that he really is human after all?) is more central to the story than a warning about not tampering with nature. The moral seems not so much that the HORARS shouldn't have been created in the first place (lest they rise up against us), but that we shouldn't treat as sub-human creatures that seems so human ("For all you know, you might be one too!").

Hues is one of the few Wolfe stories I neither like nor get (probably some relation there), so I'm not going to try discussing it.

Anyone up for making a list of Wolfe stories where the narrator is mistaken about his own identity? Off the top of my head:

"HORARS"
"The Other Dead Man"
"Checking Out"
"The Changeling"
"Tracking Song"
"Forlesen"

Latro
Both Severian and Silk to some extent
Maybe Weer in PEACE

-Rostrum

----- END urth.v017.n002 -----