

Digest urth.v019.n018

The Urth list — 6 messages, 6 voices, 13 Oct 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1170>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Alice Turner — 13 Oct 1998, 23:34

From Robert Borski

This one's for alga, because I miss her.

Well, I suppose flattery will coax me out of sulldom for a moment. First, Mr. B., unlike prion, who is almost your equal in groundless invention, I must say that I think your recent geneological ventures go beyond the far-fetched into the realm where undines swim among the stars.

Second, no, I don't think for a moment that the archives/library is guarded by taluses, I think it is "guarded" by librarians, of whom the latest guardian is Ultan, who, I need hardly remind you all, is a tribute to Borges. And if you doubt that for a moment, please pick up a copy of the splendid new fiction omnibus and compare Cyriaca's style in telling this tale to that of Borges in many stories. I put "guarded" in quotes, because the library is only a legend to everyone but neighbors and the House Absolute, and would hardly need military protection.

Sev says that he knows more of it (the library) than she because, unlike her, he has been there. But he has not before heard its history. What has the Claw to do with that? And I would propose Ymar to have started the library, not Typhon--there are hints in that direction but not the other.

And the giant mechanical soldiers which recognize either a true autarch--even to come--or a true Conciliator (or do you argue that they are taluses?), guard Mt. Typhon. This seems to me simply a remote project that ran out of funds and political interest and has been forgotten. An interestingly similar picture of an abandoned early space project in (I think) Arizona ran in today's NY Times. Cf (and not by Wolfean accident) Ozymandius. The Saltus mine is something else again. If you really do lure me back, I'm only going to demand that you stay on track. Do you really want that?

-alga

At the ridotto being held by Abdiesus, Cyriaca, on her way to seducing Severian, relates a longish tale about the Ages of Myth and Monarch respectively (SWORD, Chap. 6). I'm going to skip most of it, but you should probably read the chapter in its entirety. At any rate, to pick up the story near the end: "When morning came, [the autarch of the time] ordered that the torches not be kindled, but that there should be a great vault built to house all the volumes and scrolls the white-robed men had gathered. For he thought that if the new empire he had planned should fail him at last, he would retire to that vault and enter the worlds that, in imitation of the ancients, he was determined to cast aside.

"His empire did fail him, as it had to...But he did not retire as he had planned into that vault and the curtain wall he had caused to be built around it, for when once the wild things have been put behind a man for good and all, they are trap-wise and cannot be recaptured.

"Nevertheless, it is said that before all he gathered was sealed away, he set a guardian over it. And when that guardian's time on Urth was done, he found another, and he another, so that they continue ever faithful to the demands of that autarch..."

Cyriaca, earlier, has called this vault "the lost archives" and when she finishes her tale, Sev says, "It is a wonderful story. I think that perhaps *I know more of it than you, but I have never heard* it before."

This is because he's just realized the Claw has reawakened the guardian of the lost archives.

Still not good enough? Well, when Sev loops back in time and becomes the Conciliator in URTH, he's told that the Saltus mine is brand new. And when he's atop Mount Typhon earlier in SWORD, he can't get over how unrutted the roads are, despite the heavy traffic they would have had to bear; they're also too steep in places for regular carts and barrows. And while Cyriaca never identifies the monarch of the tale, it's fairly obvious he's Typhon--so we can pretty much guess the nature of the guardian.

In other words, whichever one of you first guessed taluses, you're right.

William H. Ansley — 14 Oct 1998, 00:11 · follows Alice Turner

Well, I suppose flattery will coax me out of sulldom for a moment. First, Mr. B., unlike prion, who is almost your equal in groundless invention, I must say that I think your recent geneological ventures go beyond the far-fetched into the realm where undines swim among the stars.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!

What a welcome breath of fresh air. I shall never be unkind to pond scum again.

Thank you, alga!

William Ansley

Peter Stephenson — 14 Oct 1998, 07:51 · follows William H. Ansley

alga wrote:

Second, no, I don't think for a moment that the archives/library is guarded by taluses, I think it is "guarded" by librarians, of whom the latest guardian is Ultan...

absolutely... even if I can't follow Severian's family tree [is there a pun about this at the Inn of Lost Loves? maybe I shouldn't start this one off] it does appear to be pretty clear this time. Is there any evidence in the story that the place with the volumes, scrolls and the series of guardians *can't* be the library, which is the obvious explanation? I worry about accepting obvious explanations, too, but you can't really dispose of them till they fail to fit.

corncrake

David Duffy — 14 Oct 1998, 12:34 · follows Peter Stephenson

Robert Borski wrote:

...Apheta (whose name means "starting place").

My Shorter Oxford has apheta as "M 17 Gk starter or sender off = HYLEG

hyleg E 17 Pers celestial indicator of the length of a newborn child's life. Astrol. The giver of life in a nativity.

Amusingly, the adjacent item was hyle Gk primordial matter of universe.

I have two possibly deceptive or just nice folk etymologies: In Peace, the brand new axe on the first page is suggested by Weer to be branded new. The SOD suggests it burning (brand) new. And in Castlevia, Morgaine says the name of Excalibur derives from Ex Calibor, although its origin is in fact as a corruption of the Welsh -- is this in Tennyson perhaps? M. is a pretty unreliable informant anyway, I guess. This latter nitpick comes from a review of Castlevia in the journal *Arthuriana* (1993 3:66), which has a few interesting thoughts.

BTW the Shorter Oxford has many BOTNS words and names, incl Severian.

David Duffy.

Kieran Mullen — 14 Oct 1998, 23:59 · follows David Duffy

From: m.driussi at genie.com

Subject: (urth) Science, Her Methods

Re: Science, scientists, and the Scientific Method. I thought that Science proceeded by way of cutting edge experiments;

Sometimes.

said

experiments derived from hypotheses (by definition based upon guesses),

Hmm. Latest Nobel prize in physics (fractional quantum Hall effect) was not based on theoretical predictions, but pushing the experiments to a different regime of parameters. The one before (Bose-Einstein condensation) *was* based on a hypothesis.

and by definition these experiments are "successful" less than one hundred percent of the time.

Only if you know what you're looking for ahead of time (i.e. BEC).

In fact, the failures usually

=outnumber= the successes. In any event, it is a =guessing= game.

I know that failures outnumber successes. I've had a lot of the form and few of the latter. But one skill one has to teach student's is the proper tweaking of the "bogo-meter": the ability to tell when a discussion or hypothesis has gone beyond the evidence. Feynman, who was not known for being an orthodox stick-in-the-mud, wrote about this as ``playing by the rules of the game". To paraphrase him, You can be as inventive as you want - as long as you play by the rules.

I admit the rules of discourse are a bit blurry, especially in literary criticism. But surely there must be *some* bounds on hermeneutics?

Am I wrong? Did all that intellectual labor go out with the alchemists?

No, I think my point is that part of the intellectual labor is being critical. As you point out, ideas are a dime a dozen. *Good* ideas are a bit more dear.

Has Science become some sort of orthodoxy of divine transmission?

Of course not. I'm not sure how this follows logically from the above discussion.

Have scientists become a species of cargo cult, waiting for the next Truth to come tumbling out the cornucopia of the vast complex?

This is weird, a complete inverse of how I see the discussion.

I view some of the postings here as "Cargo cult exegesis" since they follow the *form* of interpreting a work, but don't seem to understand the standards that apply. How can a demand for a bit more rigor be turned into an exhortation to meaningless ritual?

(Here, let me hook up my 1989 cold fusion reactor to my mid-century Dean Drive. Quick trip to see the canals of Mars.)

Interesting allusions: cold fusion and Dean drives both were extraordinary claims that required extraordinary proof. Their eventual discrediting is a tribute to rational science and the danger of not being properly self-critical. Cold fusion is an especially interesting case of an "us vs. them" mentality developing in a research group.

Sorry to go on at such length, but the issue of science and pseudo-science is one about which I feel strongly.

Michael Straight — 15 Oct 1998, 09:52 · follows Kieran Mullen

On Wed, 14 Oct 1998, Kieran Mullen wrote:

I view some of the postings here as "Cargo cult exegesis" since they follow the *form* of interpreting a work, but don't seem to understand the standards that apply.

I love this sentence so much I think I'm going to print it out and sleep with it under my pillow.

"Cargo cult exegesis"--bwahahahaha!

To go further off-topic, anyone here read Alasdair MacIntyre's AFTER VIRTUE? It occurs to me that that's the perfect phrase for what he thinks has happened to contemporary moral philosophy: Cargo Cult Ethics.

For the record, Rostrum loves reading Mr. Borski's theories (the wilder the better) and hopes that he doesn't get discouraged by our criticism, and that other people don't allow him to discourage them from posting more "mainstream" discussion. If you think some of what you're seeing here is cargo cult exegesis, you can rebutt it or just ignore it and start a discussion you like better.

-Rostrum