

Deluge, Hierodules, Materialism

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 22 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1566>

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Ori Kowarsky — 22 Apr 1999, 19:58

I'd like to thank everyone on the list for the warm welcome. In particular, thanks to alga for cluing me in on that HTML problem. I apologise for cluttering up the list with all that illegible nonsense; my intention was to clutter it up with legible nonsense.

Christoper R. Culver wrote:

"I think that the "judge" version of Tzadkiel, analogous to the Archangel Michael, would be certainly be divine. Whether of not he receives communication directly from the Pancreator is one of the more interesting mysteries of _Urth_."

I approach TBOTNS and UOTNS from a materialistic point of view. If the elements of fantasy have an ultimately scientific rationale within the context of the book, then so too should the religious elements. If, for example, Terminus Est is not a magical sword but rather a subtle and ingenious mechanism, then I believe it is appropriate to apply the same standards of proof to the larger machines -- even the deus ex machinae -- at play.

I do not blieve that Tzad is remotely connected to the Archangel Michael, in either motive or substance. If he comes off like an angel on the Day of Jugement this is a carefully orchestated effect, done for the benefit of Sev and his personal, shall we say, demons.

Alex David Groce — 23 Apr 1999, 13:59 · follows Ori Kowarsky

On Apr 22, 7:58pm, Ori Kowarsky wrote:

Subject: (urth) Deluge, Hierodules, Materialism

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either motive or substance. If he comes off like an angel on the Day of Judgement this is a carefully orchestrated effect, done for the benefit of Sev and his personal, shall we say, demons.

It can certainly be approached that way; however, from the standpoint of the author, at least, it would appear there IS an implied connection between the material events and a spiritual reality. That is, although Wolfe "plays the science fiction game" nicely and does provide a purely materialistic explanation most of the time (as in BOTLS for Silk's enlightenment, the Crane hypothesis), Wolfe obviously isn't a materialist, and the fiction stretches the belief in a purely materialistic explanation pretty thin--it works, but a more plausible worldview for the reality portrayed would accept non-material influences. I like to think of it in the Douglas Adams refutation of Sherlock Holmes' "When you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains however improbable must be the truth"--sometimes it is better to reject a certain idea of what is impossible than to accept the monstrously improbable. In other words, although Wolfe doesn't come out and FORCE acceptance of the non-material elements, his fictions are pretty heavily weighted (as I'd argue the real world is) in favor of a non-purely-materialistic explanation.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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Carlos Martinho — 23 Apr 1999, 11:55 · follows Alex David Groce

Hi! It's my first post. This
materialism/supernaturalism question in TBONS and
UOTNS
is quite interesting, so...

I guess it's a mistake to attempt to put Wolfe's work
in one of these categories, or read it in a
"materialistic" or "supernaturalistic" view. The TBONS
universe is so old that every distinction of this kind
makes no more sense in the minds of the people who
live there, and it's a new approach to us -- a
approach that we have to grasp.

It's a universe where the scientific facts are seen
just as the magic of the Increate, after all. I guess
that the best approach would be to see the Increate
as a god on the Spinozean sense: the Substance.

And, if all of us are tools of the Increate, why
couldn't Tzadikiel be some sort of high-high-high-tech
android and the archangel Gabriel at the same time? an
angel, after all, is just a messenger -- a tool -- of
the Increate...

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"The nostalgia of things unknown, of lands forgotten or
unfound, is upon me at times. Often I
long for the gleam of yellow suns upon terraces

of translucent azure marble, mocking the
windless waters of lakes unfathomably calm"

Clark Ashton Smith, "Nostalgia of the Unknown"

Michael Straight — 23 Apr 1999, 16:26 · follows Carlos Martinho

On Fri, 23 Apr 1999, Carlos Martinho wrote:
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We recently had a discussion that touched on this topic. Some people argue that the distinction between "materialistic" and "supernaturalistic" is a modern one, and that it's we who are unique in making the distinction, not the TBONS universe for not making it.

-Rostrum

Ori Kowarsky — 24 Apr 1999, 19:19 · follows Michael Straight

alga wrote:

"Now wait a sec here. Tzadkiel is not Michael but s/he certainly is an angel, not an archangel like Michael, but a sufficiently great and important being for Urth/Ushas. S/he is the Angel of Divine Justice. (My info comes from Gustav Davidson's -A Dictionary of Angels-, Free Press 1967, which is not one of those idiotic gift-books of angels, but a scholarly work). I don't have the book to hand, so cannot tell you more, but I do have a xerox of the list of the 30 top angels (and the 103 fallen angels)."

Alex David Groce wrote:

"That is, although Wolfe "plays the science fiction game" nicely and does provide a purely materialistic explanation most of the time (as in BOTLS for Silk's enlightenment, the Crane hypothesis), Wolfe obviously isn't a materialist, and the fiction stretches the belief in a purely materialistic explanation pretty thin--it works, but a more plausible worldview for the reality portrayed would accept non-material influences. I like to think of it in the Douglas Adams refutation of Sherlock Holmes' "When you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains however improbable must be the truth"--sometimes it is better to reject a certain idea of what is impossible than to accept the monstrously improbable. In other words, although Wolfe doesn't come out and FORCE acceptance of the non-material elements, his fictions are pretty heavily weighted (as I'd argue the real world is) in favor of a non-purely-materialistic explanation."

I disagree with the above two statements by alga and Alex Groce for much the same reason. They both make the assumption, and perhaps a reasonable one given what I've heard of Gene Wolfe's beliefs, that the mysteries or themes of TBOTNS may be best understood or explained through the prism of certain strands of Christian tradition. The assumption is neither correct or incorrect, it is simply one position of many and serves to prove how multifaceted and multi-dimensional an experience TBOTNS is. My personal point of view is that to assume that Tzadkiel is an angel simply because there is a tradition of there being an angel named Tzadkiel in Western culture is fine, but does that mean that every sailor named Jonas was once

swallowed by a whale in the Mediterranean?

Alex Groce believes that TBOTNS is slanted towards a non-materialistic view of the universe. I don't know. Wolfe could have written that Terminus Est was a magical sword, but in fact it is a technological artifact. The Pelerines' tent could have risen into the air by divine fiat but was in fact inflated by hot air as the Pelerines torched it. Master Malrubius could be a spiritual ghost or an angel or a spirit from heaven but he is in fact a sort of three dimensional projection. In Citadel Wolfe could have written "these Hieros are angels, they come from Heaven, the Increate is the God of the Bible" but he does not; their origin is explained in the very materialistic terms of biology, politics and technology. The whole cosmic flower metaphor or discription is actually lifted from Hinduism. The actions of the Hieros appear to me to be no different from any technologically superior colonizing force, the only difference that I see is that they look and dress like angels and monks as opposed to green men with fishbowl helmets. The issue, I would argue, is not separating the impossible from the improbable; it is separating what you want to see from what is actually there.

Ori