

# The God & His Man, a note & spoilers

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 17 Dec 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 17 Dec 1999, 07:52

I continue to toy with this Urth story (collected in ENDANGERED SPECIES).

It was the first published work to mention Urth, yet is not an extract from TBOTNS (as two other magazine stories were: "The Tale of the Student and His Son" and "Fiola's [sic] Tale: the Armiger's Daughter"); nor is it mentioned in TBOTNS (as is the case with EMPIRES OF FOLIAGE AND FLOWER); nor is it given a more detailed context or framing ("The Boy Who Hooked the Sun" is subtitled "a tale from THE BOOK OF WONDERS OF URTH AND SKY," which helps to fit it into place).

And the story!

Anyway, I mainly wanted to report a finding. The magic cloak (of invisibility) in the story is called "Tarnung," which struck me as being a Lord Dunsany-sounding detail, but a quick search on the Internet shows that tarnung is German for "cloak," yet it is also used to refer to the painting patterns on military airplanes (i.e., "camouflage"?).

SPOILERS to follow

The god's name is "Isid looo loooE": this looks an awful lot like the sacred unspeakable name of the one true Hebrew god (safename "Jehovah"; today's true name "Yahweh"; ancient magical versions include "IAOOUE," "IAOUAI,"). Or a Joycean parody of the same name (was it in the nighttown section of ULYSSES where the text takes on the format of a play, and character "God" says some windy vowels, continued by character "Dog" who howls more vowels? A sense of parody might be in the first name, which reads "I said," making the whole name a sentence: "I said, `looo loooE.'" As if to correct bumbling mortals who heard it as "Yaweh." "I said" also reminds me of "I am that which I am" or somesuch line attributed to God in the Old Testament; also "In the beginning was the word," where this name says something like "I said the Word."

This god is a starship orbiting planet Zed. ("Zed," as a name for the letter Z, suggests the last in a sequence.) Zed has three types of people: desert dwellers (ala Middle East), jungle dwellers (ala equatorial Africa), and cold land dwellers (ala Europe). The recently arrived god has plans--since he likes the Europeans best, because they are most like him, he is going to engineer their colonization of the planet.

Hmmm. That does sound like a criticism of Christian sanction of colonization. Chosen people; conquer in my name; God is on our side. Especially sharp as it traces colonial impulse to the god (which is Yaweh or a parody), rather than the "mankind uses the name of God to unholy ends" line of reasoning.

Speaking of authorial context, if this story was written by Michael Moorcock my interpretation of it would be relatively cut and dry--I have read enough Moorcock work that is a variation on this theme, so that I wouldn't give it a second thought. Elric and Arioeh, that sort of thing: we might

call it "Elric's Revenge." When Moorcock takes a swipe at Big Religion it is often targeted at Roman Catholicism, but sometimes all of Christianity. The name of the god seems rather close to a swipe at the Jews, which seems uncharacteristic of Moorcock, so I'd transfer this to the early Christian church (and we're back to Catholic bashing). (I can't think of a case where Moorcock writes positively about any religion.)

But because it was written by Gene Wolfe, and because it was published before TBOTNS, it serves as a sort of overture to TBOTNS. Which makes it very interesting to me.

=mantis=

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Jim Jordan — 09 Jan 2000, 17:48 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

At 07:52 AM 12/17/99 -0700, you wrote:

The god's name is "Isid looo loooE":

I'll add a thought, which is probably wrong (almost certainly) but may spark someone else's thinking. "151D 1000, I.E." Id est, (i.e.,) means "that is," and means that 151D 1000 exists. He is (claiming) self-existence, which makes his "death" at the end more interesting.

this looks an awful lot like the sacred unspeakable name of the one true Hebrew god (safename "Jehovah"; today's true name "Yahweh"; ancient magical versions include "IAOOUE," "IAOUAI,"). Or a Joycean parody of the same name (was it in the nighttown section of ULYSSES where the text takes on the format of a play, and character "God" says some windy vowels, continued by character "Dog" who howls more vowels? A sense of parody might be in the first name, which reads "I said," making the whole name a sentence: "I said, `looo loooE.'" As if to correct bumbling mortals who heard it as "Yaweh." "I said" also reminds me of "I am that which I am" or somesuch line attributed to God in the Old Testament; also "In the beginning was the word," where this name says something like "I said the Word."

If it's such a parody, then it is a computer PLAYING at being God, and that will have to be taken into account. This ain't no true God, and no true image of God, as I show below.

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Mind - Europeans, and being mental, the computer likes them best.

Will - high desert people, living by their wills

Emotion - jungle people

True humanity needs all three, as Man realizes, so he kills the false god of the computer.

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I think you misread. It is about humanity-in-full, as noted, set out as a tale that might well be in Severian's book. The Universe is already "old," but not as old as it will be in Sev's time. Anyway, the final question is whether it is better to live as a slave or die, and the answer is that life is preferable, because where there is life there is hope.

The god-computer seals his doom by giving the wrong preference. He is but a slave, as Man realizes. He is not any true God, or he would recognize the fullness of the image of God in the three kinds (aspects) of people.

I suggest a closer link, conceptually, to the scientismists in Lewis's

*\*That Hideous Strength.\** They would destroy humanity in the interest of abstractions. That is what the computer would do also, and what the mental-folk of the cold lands wind up doing.

The critique is, thus, not of Christianity, but of scientism.

Finally, FWIW,. If we try to link this story specifically with Blue-Green, it will have to be a B-G that comes into existence long after it has been colonized by humans -- but still before Severian (if this story is in the Brown Book).

Nutria