

Strange Travelers again. Sorry.

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 07 Apr 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2184>

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Tony Ellis — 07 Apr 2000, 15:31

Do I win a prize for being Last Person To Read Strange Travelers? My copy arrived 2 days ago. Apologies for discussing stuff everyone else got bored of months ago.

I've got as far as 1-2-3 For Me. I'd just like to say that I agree 101% with William H. Ansley's view that this is a ghost story, pure and simple. In particular it's an M.R. Jamesian ghost story, and I was a little surprised to see no one else suggest this connection. For me there's a definite sly wink in the direction of James's classic "Oh Whistle, and I'll Come To You, My Lad!" Especially when you compare the two titles: Wolfe's reads like a deliberately cheeky, modernistic response to the Master. Why whistle, when you can tone-dial?

In Jame's story it's an ancient whistle that's dug up, and out of an old Templar's chapel rather than a post-future city. Rather than numbers the whistle has a Latin inscription, but blowing it summons a Something, just as surely as dialing that old mobile phone does.

Now, before everyone jumps on me, I'm well aware that the old artifact-that-summons-a-nasty plot has been used in a thousand ghost stories other than James's, but I also think it's fair to say that this is a device James pretty much made his own. More importantly, the Pusher that the phone summons is absolutely an M.R. James ghost. One of the more disturbing aspects of the old boy's stories is the sheer unpleasantness of his ghosts. They're not ethereal, wispy things: they're corporeal, skeletal, fleetingly glimpsed, and often hairy. Horribly hairy.

Why did the mobile phone turn up in Jak's backpack when he thought he'd got rid of it? Because that's what cursed items do, folks. It's in the rules.

Various conspiracy theories involving bots and loss of cultural symbols seem to have been spun out of this one, but I don't think this story has particularly more to say about societal collapse than any other which uses a Fallen Civilisation backdrop. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun? One generation goeth, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.

Jim Jordan — 07 Apr 2000, 13:11 · follows Tony Ellis

Don't apologize, especially if you have such interesting things to post. Got any more insights?

Nutria

At 04:31 PM 4/7/00 +0100, you wrote:

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