

the JCdeck in TD and LB

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 06 May 2000

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 06 May 2000, 17:15

The essays that alga and I wrote about John Crowley's fiction appeared in "The New York Review of Science Fiction" no. 132, 134, and 137, available for \$3.50 each. Please see <http://www.nyrsf.html> for details on ordering.

The decks of cards John Crowley invents and uses in first THE DEEP (1975) and much later LITTLE, BIG (1981) are remarkably similar: "people" cards (52 in both cases), and "action" cards (7/14 in TD [that is, there are seven possessors, but each has two modes]; 21 in LB [we are only given around 15 of them]) which are used to modify, influence, or depict the actions of the people cards.

With regard to my notion of the historical Tarot reflecting the secret history of the fairies across the centuries, diminishing over time, Adam

wrote:

An ingenious scheme to save your theory, and one which neatly solves the problem of the number of cards, which had occurred to me, if only vaguely (I never saw alga's piece). I see two objections, though.

1) The repeated statements, in the conversation between Sophie and the returned Lilac, that the number of fairies left is "so few" ("A Parliament," VI, 2) suggest that the number remaining is only a small proportion, and that there were originally hundreds or even thousands, too many for any tarot deck. I seem to recall Sophie's shock when she first guesses that there are only fifty-two left, which would support the same conclusion, but I can't find the passage.

2) If the current number of Drinkwaters isn't equal to the original number of fairies, then what reason is there to think that the Drinkwaters replacing the fairies is a cyclical event at all? As far as I can remember, the only "race" of fairies we ever hear about are the ones the Drinkwaters interact with. (Even if we accept the Bramble-Drinkwater theory of concentric worlds as accurate, this doesn't imply successive types of fairies, since it's said explicitly that one race of fairies occupies all the inner "worlds.")

Spoilers for THE DEEP to follow:

In TD, the original clonal colonists numbered 52, or there about.

Centuries later, the Just use cards to divine who they must assassinate: even among hundreds or thousands of people extant in that weird little world, there are still fifty-two (leaders) who stand in for the unsuspecting masses (peasants, merchants, etc.) and thus no matter how large the population grows, the 52 cards are elastic enough. (As people are killed, new people rise to fill the vacancy in society and in the cards.)

In LB, lo and behold, we find another situation where there are 52 people cards, and 52 people

are going to colonize a new world. It is perhaps overly tempting to believe that the same rules apply: that one card can stand for the leader of legions. (That is: the cards do not =normally= represent the entire population of the fairy world; it is shocking when they do.)

But LB is set on our world, and our world has a real set of cards that we know as "Tarot." So it seems to me that the JC deck is either the "true" original, of which all Tarot are just poor imitations (shades of Zelazny's Amber and/or its deck of cards); or the JC deck is a final version (endproduct of Tarot-as-secret-history-of-fairies, as I mentioned before) and is "true" because it has been tweaked by the fairies themselves; or the JC deck has no relation to Tarot, because it is based upon playing cards, with a few new "action" cards thrown in. The third is the most realistic; I doubt that the second really occurred to John Crowley, but I dreamed it up as a way of answering the relationship between the Tarot and the JC deck (since both do exist in the world of LB, iirc). I keep juggling all three.

If one grants that the JC deck is an invention of JC rather than anything Tarot, then one looks through JC's other fictions to see how the same is used there.

Re: fairy bloodlines, Adam's arguments seem less and less arguments than agreements with alga. He writes that the fairies are not interested in reproduction, but he also says that they do want a one-to-one substitution of themselves when they go to the next level in

(And to revert to a logical viewpoint, if the fairies' goal is to spread their genes, wouldn't it be simpler and quicker to just mate with as many humans as possible, rather than arrange one human-fairy marriage and wait a century for its descendants?)

The ulterior motive behind the fairies' meddling with the Drinkwaters is not reproduction, I would argue, but survival. For some reason, the Drinkwaters have to cross over into the fairies' country in order for the fairies to be able to go further inward themselves, and take refuge from the humans. Perhaps, though this is just a guess, the substitution even has to be one-to-one, which would explain why there are fifty-two fairies and fifty-two Drinkwaters

. . . well, this is "zero population growth" reproduction; reproduction =is= biological survival; it fits with what alga is saying--not that they want to multiply in such numbers as to swarm over the Earth (Adam's "mate with as many humans as possible" strawman), but to multiply in numbers sufficient to start the colony in the next world, when it becomes vacant.

Adam likewise argues against the notion of a fairy bloodline, insisting that Alice & Co. are all 100% human, but he also writes that there is only one kind of fairy. So then I guess Adam is arguing the human colonization of the next world as a truly new event (a sort of "Firebase Alpha"), with further human journeys of conquest inward ahead; because otherwise, if he sees that the fairies have guided and/or seeded the human family, giving them powers that normal humans do not have (and the powers seem to run in the family, but they might be "given" by the fairies rather than "inherited" from the human parents), then the distinction between human and fairy races begins to break down: we have at least a hybrid fairy/human group (violating the "one fairy race" theory), or perhaps a human group that has been made fully fairy. Through hardware (genetics) and/or software (theosophy).

That is to say, Adam agrees with alga: there is only one race of fairy, and Alice & Co. is fairy as much as the old fairies were/are; and the fairies are the ones and the only ones who plumb the worlds-in-worlds.

As for "bringing the cards in line with the house," no, no, no: it is the other way around. JC invented the cards years before, for TD: he built the house around it.

And yes, I use the toy from "In Blue" (from NOVELTY) to peg the number of inner worlds in LB at five: the first world inward is the world of Fire. Which is another plausible reason why "Smoky" (note fire association) cannot cross the line, or so it seems to me. (Other plausible reasons include, but are not limited to: he is human and the others are fairy; he does not believe, and they do believe; he chooses oblivion, they choose another world.)

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