

Little, Big: 52; Eigenblick

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 08 May 2000

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Adam Stephanides — 08 May 2000, 09:32

alga wrote:

Can someone supply page (or chapter) numbers for 52 fairies, 52 Drinkwater kin and 52 cards? Thanks.

I can only cite page numbers for the original 1981 Bantam trade paperback. But I'll do that, along with chapters. 52 cards: "The Least Trumps," II, 3, p. 156; confirmed in "Fifty-Two," VI, 1, pp. 432-33. 52 fairies: "A Parliament" VI, 2, p. 459.

The other 52 does not, strictly speaking, refer to the Drinkwater kin, but to the guests at the wedding party/wake. This doesn't include Grandfather Trout, and it does include Eigenblick; it's not clear whether it includes Fred or Alice. And it's not stated explicitly, or even implied conclusively: Sophie tries to count the guests, but fails, and then thinks "anyway she didn't need to count in order to know how many were here." ("She's Here, She's Near," VI, 5, p. 536.) Given the importance of the number 52, this probably means that there are 52 guests (or at least Sophie thinks there are), but you could put another construction on it.

There's another 52 too, which hasn't been mentioned so far: 52 henchmen of Russell Eigenblick transformed into playing cards ("Fifty-two Pickup," VI, 4, p. 510). This number doesn't include Eigenblick himself, who is turned into the Fool.

Speaking of Eigenblick, a long time ago (well, it seems that way) alga asked if somebody could justify the presence of the Eigenblick subplot. It's not my favorite part of the book either, and Eigenblick's speech is the one passage in the book which rings false to me. Still, the subplot does have the function of showing just how ruthless the fairies are. As for any other functions, this is the best I can come up with: when we first hear of Eigenblick, he seems to be the activist counterpart of the Drinkwaters, fighting against the Noisy Bridge Rod and Gun Club to re-enchant the world. But Eigenblick proves to be an insane tyrant who brings disaster to the whole nation (except the Drinkwaters). The moral is either that politics is no good (a very seventies conclusion); or that any sort of action to bring the fairies closer is wrong, and the only acceptable course is to wait passively like the Drinkwaters do (somewhat like the "negative Taoism" mantis found in GWOt); or that longing for enchantment is wrong in itself (as Nutria would argue). You pays your money and you takes your choice. I think the first two are definitely there, and possibly intimations of the third as well.

--Adam

Jim Jordan — 10 May 2000, 16:20 · follows Adam Stephanides

At 09:32 AM 5/8/00 -0700, you wrote:

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In any pantheistic construction of reality, you have yin and yang, positive and negative, good and evil -- somehow. Maybe there are "two" decks of 52 cards, one positive and one negative. Fairies and anti-fairies. Demons and gods. Those moving out of the Christian/Humanist world move both ways or either way. Make sense?

In which case, the "war" is not merely the red-herring I originally thought. The negative 52 are "winter" and the positive 52 are "summer." And they are involved in an eternal "war."

As to the "cyclical" business: I submit that it will depend on a closer description of what is actually cyclical. The allusions to the passage of the seasons implies a cycle. The people of "our" world wind up with a legend that someday Eigenblick will return. That implies to me that this Tale will recur, and that Daily Alice & Co. will in time recruit new future-fairies to replace them, and will move farther "within."

Nutricious

Adam Stephanides — 12 May 2000, 09:16 · follows Jim Jordan

Nutria wrote:

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Making Eigenblick's henchmen the positive deck? But Eigenblick regards himself as an ally of the fairies, though they cheat him in the end. And Eigenblick and the fairies collaborate to bring about "winter."

The people of "our" world wind up with a legend that someday Eigenblick will return.

But as Ariel points out, there have been many legends of dead leaders someday returning; most are not true. Moreover, Barbarossa [Eigenblick] really had been put to sleep for a thousand years, having been "stored up" by the fairies so that he could return. But Eigenblick is ensconced as king in the fairy country, and (at least as I see it) unlikely to return.

--Adam