

A walk on the wild side

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 10 Aug 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2340>

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Jim Russell — 10 Aug 2000, 15:14

This is completely irrelevant to the current field of discussion, but I'm writing up my piece for the symposium at the moment, and have just realised that there is a question that I would be interested to hear anyone's opinion on. Its fairly straightforward, so...

In Sword Cyriaca tells the story of the lost archive, and states that at some point in the distant past the starfaring dudes left their wild half behind, which was then sold to the thinking machines who incorporated it into their designs for cities etc, etc. Im sure you are all fairly familiar with the passage. What interests me is: What do you interpret this to mean? - or more precisely - what do you think actually happened for these forms of behaviour to be seperated?

Like I said, pretty straightforward, but I'd be really interested to hear what anyone has to say.

Jim Russell
University of Exeter

Michael Andre-Driussi — 10 Aug 2000, 14:53 · follows Jim Russell

Jim Russell wrote:

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Well =I= always took it to mean that the people had become rather like "Star Trek" <tm> Vulcans <tm>; favoring "logic" in their culture and erasing "non-logic" (including emotions, grim fairy tales, folk dancing, fiction) from their culture. So they were like the Ascians in that sense (although not necessarily molded by "Correct Thought") of being machine-like. My sense of that story is that the wild stuff was the stuff that had actually brought humanity out of the jungle in the first place. Which makes it a form of technology, in a way; and antiquated technologies are discarded every day (buggy whips, telegraph relay stations).

So the starfaring people thought that they would improve themselves by getting rid of this old stuff that tied them to the nasty, brutish past. But according to the story this was a case of

throwing the baby out with the bathwater (it all turns out okay, though, when the baby crawls back in through the doggie door).

As to what happened to cause this separation between logic and non-logic, it seems to me to be the same sort of scientific triumphs that we have seen in the 20th century: real miracles, real terrors, real predictions validated through experimentation (and any "failure" just points the way to later success--nothing invalidates Science itself), and so forth.

I think the story is about the need for a balance of things: a golden rule of nothing to excess (where the singleminded pursuit of logic is an excess).

=mantis=

Greene, Carlton — 10 Aug 2000, 18:24 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis wrote:

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I think the story is about the need for a balance of things: a golden rule of nothing to excess (where the singleminded pursuit of logic is an excess).

Given this separation, by what means did man "sell" his wild side to the machines?

works

Tony Ellis — 11 Aug 2000, 12:18 · follows Greene, Carlton

I've always been intrigued by the way Cyriaca's story seems to anticipate what Severian is later told in the "Key to the Universe" chapter of Citadel of the Autarch. In both stories, humanity creates a race of beings that is more perfect than itself. The Hieros can transcend time, the machines have the wildness that humanity has lost. In both stories, the created ultimately remakes, and thereby redeems, the creator. The machines return to us our wildness, the Heiros make us into beings as puissant as themselves.

Interestingly, in both stories the act is described as being as much revenge as it is altruism. Being reborn is painful. (The act, one might almost say, of a Torturer).

In both stories, the created race is a sort of physical manifestation of humanity's knowledge, learning made flesh. It seems to me that behind both, a specific Wolfen principle can be found:

"We believe that we invent symbols. The truth is that they invent us; we are their creatures, shaped by their hard, defining edges."

Tony Ellis
On-line Editor, PC Format magazine
01225 442244 x2349
<http://www.pcformat.co.uk>

Daniel Fusch — 11 Aug 2000, 21:51 · follows Tony Ellis

From: Michael Andre-Driussi <mantis at sirius.com>

Well =I= always took it to mean that the people had become rather like "Star Trek" <tm> Vulcans <tm>; favoring "logic" in their culture and erasing "non-logic" (including emotions, grim fairy tales, folk dancing, fiction) from their culture.

I agree with this to a certain extent; I always had the impression that Cyriaca was speaking of a modernist separation of "thought" and "feeling." Still, I wonder if perhaps the ancient race put away their "wild things" less from favoring logic than from simple forgetfulness; that is, perhaps they became too utilitarian, too reliant on technology, and then lost touch with art, imagination, and passion. They "reached the stars, and...bargained away all the wild half of themselves to do so, so that they no longer cared for the taste of the pale wind, nor for love or lust, nor to make new songs nor to sing old ones, nor any of the other animal things..." (BotNS, III, vi). They became too mechanistic and forgot the spiritual and artistic dimension of their lives.

I think the story is about the need for a balance of things: a golden rule of nothing to excess (where the singleminded pursuit of logic is an excess).

I think this is right on the mark; the ancient race is set in contrast, perhaps, to the zoanthropes, who bargain away their intellect to embrace the otium and forgetfulness of "animal things." At any rate, considering the role that storytelling and the finding of old stories (the Book of the Wonders of Urth and Sky, for instance) plays in Severian's narrative, I doubt the condition of the ancients who bargained away their passions is positive.

Daniel

Daniel Fusch — 11 Aug 2000, 22:01 · follows Daniel Fusch

From: "Greene, Carlton" <CGreene2 at hunton.com>
Given this separation, by what means did man "sell" his wild side to the machines?

Ambiguous...but I took this simply to mean that in creating machines that are artificial intelligences and that therefore live and have personalities (and "hearts"), humanity created beings capable of developing culture, feeling, emotion, of making stories and of telling them, etc. In the race to create artificial beings that would be "human," mankind did its job too well--or rather, they could not help but make machines that could feel as well as think, though they "never reckoned with that." They made imitations of themselves, children who still had the art and imagination the parents had forgotten. Frankenstein creates a monster that has its own humanity and is capable of emotion and great passion, though Frankenstein had meant to design only a tool for his own drive for perfection and glory; the Creature comes to hate its creator both for creating it and for the creator's own lack of emotion and sympathy.

Daniel