

Driving past Castlevue

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 Jan 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2535>

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Tony Ellis — 09 Jan 2001, 09:59

Spectacled Bear wrote:

Does that mean you can answer all, many, or even some of the long list of questions I posted a few weeks ago?

I did say I would have a bash at those myself. Dan'l Danehy-Oakes made some interesting suggestions, here are some of mine. Three key points first:

1. I would like to resurrect Nutria's argument that Castlevue is "about perception". This is a recurring theme in Wolfe's work, and a particularly important one here. Wolfe makes Shields spend two solid pages explaining to Bob Roberts how people who saw a castle with three, four or even five towers could actually have been seeing the same castle. He even makes a little model, for pity's sake. Wolfe could have saved himself a big wodge of expository writing here simply by saying that everyone who saw the castle saw the same number of towers. That he didn't suggests to me that he wants us to think about people seeing the same thing differently because they're seeing it from different perspectives.

2. Tom Stoppard once described "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" as the dramatic equivalent of driving past Elsinore castle. You might see a ghost on the ramparts, you might glimpse a funeral procession in your wing mirror, but like poor R and G themselves you would have no idea from these snapshots what the "real story" was all about. I find that a useful way of thinking about Castlevue.

3. We see the supernatural characters, which Dan'l Danehy-Oakes usefully identifies as "fey", primarily in terms of late western European mythology, and particularly Arthurian mythology. But as with the Latro books, Wolfe is writing from the post-White Goddess, post-Joseph Campbell standpoint that understands that mythical characters overlap. Thus Viviane Morgan isn't just the Lady of the Lake and Morgan le Fay, she's also the Phantom Hitcher - a modern myth which I don't suppose dates back much more than 50 years.

Is Shields really killed?

Nope. See the quote from Morte d'Arthur prefacing the book.

Who is Liam Fee... Is he really an alien or monster, as he appears to be when Hwan Lee stuns him?

He's an alien and a faerie - different ways of looking at the same entity. In the fine Wolfe short story "A Cabin On the Coast" a pipe-smoking leprechaun tells the protagonist "Would ye like to see me as a tiny green man wi' horns like a snail's? I can do that too."

Who is Lucie?

A tenant of Meadow Grass who has been turned into a vampire.

Why is she pretending to be French, or if she really is French, why does she sound American for a while to Sally?

I think she really is French, because that's how she talks when she is alone with Boomer. I don't know why she drops the accent with Sally, or why she picks it up again when Seth is mentioned. Wolfe gives us quite a few hints about Lucie, which makes me feel there's something here we're just not seeing.

G. Gordon Kitty is great fun

Agreed. I wish there was more of him in the novel.

What's all the business with the organ playing in the museum?

I can't improve on Dan'l's "cool effects?" With its insanely, ludicrously frenetic pace, and magically-transformed cats, I don't think this is a book we are supposed to take -too- seriously.

Viviane Morgan appears to be Vivian *and* Morgan le Fay. How does she manage to be both?

Because these are just our personifications of the same supernatural being.

Von Madadh is King of Hounds or Wolves, and he's the dog that Sally thinks is Remy. But what's he doing? Is he just there to lure everyone to the Castle?

Seems so to me. Given that he's the leader of Morgan's troops in the final battle, and gives Shields his mortal wound, I suspect that he's also Mordred.

Is all the trouble at Meadow Grass to do with the attempts to kill Wrangler?

Not necessarily. The camp has the misfortune to be both isolated and located near a gateway to Faerie, so a certain amount of mischief seems inevitable.

Peter Westlake — 11 Jan 2001, 18:41 · follows Tony Ellis

At 09:59 2001-01-09 +0000, Tony Ellis wrote:
Spectacled Bear wrote:

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I did say I would have a bash at those myself. Dan'l Danehy-Oakes made some interesting suggestions, here are some of mine. Three key points first:

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That's very true. These things don't get in there by accident, especially with Wolfe. Like the talos factory. So I agree, perception is important, and that explains why some people see aliens, others fairies, others wild Indians. The same thing happens here, of course, though they tend to be weather balloons.

2. Tom Stoppard once described "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" as the dramatic equivalent of driving past Elsinore castle. You might see a ghost on the ramparts, you might glimpse a funeral procession in your wing mirror, but like poor R and G themselves you would have no

idea from these snapshots what the "real story" was all about. I find that a useful way of thinking about Castlevania.

It certainly describes how it feels to read it! I hope for something a little more than that, though, even if we never understand everything. It already makes more sense that it did the first couple of times I read it.

Is Shields really killed?

Nope. See the quote from Morte d'Arthur prefacing the book.

Ah! So, was he carrying the scabbard? I'll have a look when I get home.

Who is Liam Fee... Is he really an alien or monster, as he appears to be when Hwan Lee stuns him?

He's an alien and a faerie – different ways of looking at the same entity. In the fine Wolfe short story "A Cabin On the Coast" a pipe-smoking leprechaun tells the protagonist "Would ye like to see me as a tiny green man wi' horns like a snail's? I can do that too."

Yes. His "monster" form may be his true shape or a wild distortion caused by partial concussion. I quite like both of those ideas :-)

Who is Lucie?

A tenant of Meadow Grass who has been turned into a vampire.

Like Sancha? Sancha really *is* turned into a vampire, complete with an almost plausible rational explanation very reminiscent in tone of those interviews in which Wolfe argues for the reality of Bigfoot in historical times, or the Greek gods. Like the Bigfoot/troll, this is a case of Faerie being much more physically and objectively "real" (in the story, and in Wolfe's real-life opinions) than we would expect. But I digress. Why would Lucie be afraid of Sancha, or vulnerable to her? Her name is "de Carabas", too, which strongly suggests she is from the Other Side, not an innocent camper.

Why is she pretending to be French, or if she really is French, why does she sound American for a while to Sally?

I think she really is French, because that's how she talks when she is alone with Boomer. I don't know why she drops the accent with Sally, or why she picks it up again when Seth is mentioned. Wolfe gives us quite a few hints about Lucie, which makes me feel there's something here we're just not seeing.

Yes.

G. Gordon Kitty is great fun

Agreed. I wish there was more of him in the novel.

What's all the business with the organ playing in the museum?

I can't improve on Dan's "cool effects?" With its insanely, ludicrously frenetic pace, and magically-transformed cats, I don't think this is a book we are supposed to take -too- seriously.

Very true, but everything else *fits* so neatly. It isn't just supernatural effects carelessly thrown in for effect - there clearly is some deeper theme. Perception, and the Arthurian myth are two things that pull it all together. I just don't believe in loose ends in Wolfe, especially not big loud ones.

Viviane Morgan appears to be Vivian *and* Morgan le Fay. How does she manage to be both?

Because these are just our personifications of the same supernatural being.

Well, yes, but there do seem to be two of them in Arthur. I think. Probably.

Von Madadh is King of Hounds or Wolves, and he's the dog that Sally thinks is Remy. But what's he doing? Is he just there to lure everyone to the Castle?

Seems so to me. Given that he's the leader of Morgan's troops in the final battle, and gives Shields his mortal wound, I suspect that he's also Mordred.

He echoes Mordred in those respects, certainly. I wonder if there are any other parallels? We are dealing with resonances rather than exact correspondences, of course, but it may shed some light somewhere. He seems too likable to be Mordred, though. When he isn't killing the book's main protagonist, of course ...

Is all the trouble at Meadow Grass to do with the attempts to kill Wrangler?

Not necessarily. The camp has the misfortune to be both isolated and located near a gateway to Faerie, so a certain amount of mischief seems inevitable.

That might be it.

Spectacled Bear.