

ENGINE SUMMER: Why?

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 21 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2595>

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Adam Stephanides — 21 Apr 2001, 12:59

I'm taking advantage of Ranjit's offer to discuss Crowley on the urth list. This post grows out of a discussion a few of us have been having about ENGINE SUMMER, which appears to have ground to a halt.

on 4/17/01 9:30 PM, Michael Andre-Driussi at mantis at sirius.com wrote:
Re: the rape comment. Careful readers might have spotted this first in the old message to David Duffy (who should be sending a message any moment now). Because somewhere else we were talking about authorial cruelty, and I wrote something along the lines: if the sphere is a book or record that bleeds and pleads not to be turned off, then it isn't a book or record as we know these things, and the repeated activation/deactivation is unbelievably cruel, like a multiple rape (and essentially pointless since there are recordings made so that the thing doesn't have to be activated for a true reader to read the story; it only serves for purposes of interrogation, questioning the sphere).

Michael raises an important question: why have Rush tell his story? According to the angel's final description of how Rush has "made them happy," the point of using the sphere is not to learn what happened to Rush; it's to **be** Rush temporarily. The angel does apparently answer this question at the start of the fourth crystal: Rush asks her why she needs the crystals, and she replies "Only to see...to see how strong you are. I mean whether the story will change, depending on who..." [ellipses Crowley's]. But her hesitant speech here, which is not at all typical of her, makes me suspect she is being evasive. And in any case, her explanation is weak: with 298 copies of the story on file already, the angels should know how much variability there is in Rush's story without needing a 299th.

There are a few clues scattered throughout the book. Near the start of the second crystal, Rush asks the angel who he is, adding: "It's very confusing. I feel myself to be me, and only me; but that can't be so." (note that Rush knows from the start his situation, since Mongolfier had explained to him what he was going to do). The angel replies "Go on with your story; it's less confusing. It's best just to tell the story beginning to end--that's something we know about you." The angel's final phrase suggests that they have previously tried not having Rush tell his story, and the results have been bad. And in ENGINE SUMMER itself, we see that Rush is calm as long as he is telling his story, but as soon as the story ends he becomes very distressed, and indeed asks to be "put to sleep."

The other clues fit in with the suspicion aroused by this one. Near the start of the fifth facet of the second crystal, Rush asks "Do you know this story better than I do?" and the angel replies: "Go on. It's not for my sake you tell it." At first this seems to have an obvious meaning: Rush tells the story for the sake of the city of angels as a whole. But on further thought, this doesn't really work. If the angel knows Rush's story, then so does the city. If the angel is talking about how this Rush will tell the story, then she doesn't know this either. So for who else's sake could Rush be telling the story? In light of the preceding clue, I submit that the answer is Rush himself; and ultimately Rush's host, who will thus be able to prolong his "possession" by Rush.

The remaining clue is less weighty, but consistent with this line of thought. At the start of the third crystal, Rush says "Angel...tell me this now..." and the angel replies "No. Not yet" and asks him about his story. It's a fair bet that Rush is going to ask questions about his current situation, and the angel says "not yet" because she knows that once he begins thinking about his situation the session is over.

Collectively, the implication of these passages is clear. The angels are aware of how traumatic Rush's afterlife is for him. The reason they have him tell his story each time is not to hear the new host's spin on it, although that's a side benefit, but to keep "Rush" from falling apart for as long as possible, and so prolong the "possession." Returning to the passage I began with, the angel told the truth in the first sentence. They record the sessions with Rush to see how strong Rush is, literally: to make sure they aren't putting more strain on him than he can endure.

Michael will probably be pleased that I'm arguing, not only that the angel knows in advance that she will be inflicting pain on Rush, but that she lies outright to him (no truthful speaker she!). But in partial extenuation of the angels, if the sphere is just a recording, and so feels nothing, then the only entity really suffering is Rush's host, who knew what he was letting himself in for. One might ask, if the angel is going to lie to Rush, why doesn't she lie about his having been reactivated many times before, since this upsets him so much? Perhaps they feel he's entitled to know the truth about something so crucial to his own situation. Or maybe they've already tried telling him this was the first time, and that upset Rush too (from the quote in my third paragraph, it seems Rush suspects he's been revived before).

--Adam

Michael Andre-Driussi — 21 Apr 2001, 11:51 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam wrote about ENGINE SUMMER, including this bit:

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There is also the obvious metafictional answer: it is not for the angels, nor their city, but only for the reader of ENGINE SUMMER. This ties in with the large and complex "reader/text" mode (where Rush is like a text and the recording angel is like a reader; and they are all fictions in a story, trying to work out another story, for a reader who is above and beyond them). Unfortunately this has a side-effect of implicating the real reader with the torture.

"Why are you torturing me?"

"To entertain the reader. Look, it is working--she smiles!"

=mantis=

Sirius Fiction

Adam Stephanides — 25 Apr 2001, 22:22 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

on 4/24/01 7:26 PM, eli+ at gs211.sp.cs.cmu.edu at eli+ at gs211.sp.cs.cmu.edu wrote:

I'm cc'ing blindly to the urth list, which I'm not on (until such time as I read enough Wolfe that it wouldn't be spoiler bombardment) -- I hope this is apropos to whatever's going on over there.

At the moment, very little is going on, and we've been given permission by the list's moderator to discuss Crowley (though there doesn't seem to be much interest at the moment).

Adam Stephanides wrote:

and she replies "Only to see...to see how strong you are. I mean whether the story will change, depending on who..." [ellipses Crowley's]. But her hesitant speech here, which is not at all typical of her, makes me suspect she is being evasive. And in any case, her explanation is weak: with 298 copies of the story on file already, the angels should know how much variability there is in Rush's story without needing a 299th.

The 299th recording wouldn't tell them much new about variability, but more than that, it's not apparent it would tell them much new at all. I agree the angel's being shady, but I can't see what the real answer would have to be to sound convincing.

Um. You know when you go... bungee-jumping or something? And they offer you a videotape of your jump, as a souvenir?

But if this were the answer, why would the angel be evasive?

I began with, the angel told the truth in the first sentence. They record the sessions with Rush to see how strong Rush is, literally: to make sure they aren't putting more strain on him than he can endure.

Hmm, expand on this for me? How do the recordings let them do this?

I admit this is the most conjectural part of my theory. I was imagining a committee or something going over the crystal afterwards, seeing what got Rush agitated and what calmed him down. Or perhaps the crystals serve like the black box recording in a plane's cockpit--in case the session does "crash," they'll be able to tell what they did wrong.

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I feel like there's another person here, a Rush-in-the-host. He's doing the suffering. The host will come back later and take the memories. There's certainly a lot of pain tangled up -- my reading was that David's use of "rape" was in reference to Rush's pain here, and Michael's recent use was to the host's.

My sense is that though Rush-in-the-host and the host may be separate personalities, there is only one consciousness, or "soul," that of the host. I can't prove it, though.

--Adam

eli+ — 27 Apr 2001, 17:09 · follows Adam Stephanides

(fwd of the message that only Adam got.)

Adam Stephanides wrote:

Michael raises an important question: why have Rush tell his story?

I like your sharpening of this point, and I think your theory -- that it's to extend the host's Rush experience by keeping Rush stable -- is well supported, especially considering the amount of evidence available. (Let's ignore the meta answer that Rush's telling his story constitutes the book.) A possible variant is that being Rush telling his story is what the host is after.

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Um. You know when you go... bungee-jumping or something? And they offer you a videotape of your jump, as a souvenir?

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The variant on your interpretation: it could be that Rush's telling is for the host's sake, but not because Rush breaks down without it -- instead, because the Rush experience that the host is after is the experience of telling the story. Of being a truthful speaker. ("We are truthful speakers too", indeed.) Well, to be precise, the memory of that experience.

I do think that 2.1 "Go on with your story; it's less confusing. It's best just to tell the story beginning to end--that's something we know about you." does support your variant better, but it could mean that the host is after a "truthful speaking" trip rather than one about tangled identity games.

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When Rush gets his letter from Dr. Boots: "And then there came the time that I must tell you of, but can't; the time when Boots was there, and I was not. When I was not in Rush that Speaks,

and Boots was; when Boots lived; when she was Rush and I was not; when I was not at all." (A precise description of the(?) mystical experience, according to traditions that interpret it as possession by an Eternal, but I bet none of them ever figured the Eternal was a stray cat.) Doesn't sound like the host is there at all. But in that case the host didn't remember anything afterwards, while in this case he will. Whether that makes a difference is a psychological question too deep for me.

Tangentially: after the letter, there is a distinction made between "Rush" and "I". For months, if I remember right, until the `confusion'? I wonder if the Rush-sphere has this effect, or only Boots, or whether the lingering depersonalization is a drug-anecdote without general implications for the physics of the story.

More tangentially: _ES_ mixed with Hoban's _The Medusa Frequency_ forms an admirable confusion.

DON'T THINK OF ME. IF YOU THINK OF ME I MAY BE REAL. LET ME NOT BE REAL. says the Kraken, the giant squid in that netsuke with the girl and the giant squid, Orpheus.

Is there a story of me? I asked myself. Am I in it?

Eli Brandt | eli+ at cs.cmu.edu | <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~eli/>