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The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 May 2001

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 08 May 2001, 15:38

Hey, wow, I got an Urth digest! First time in a week or so, maybe?

SPOILERS FOR COPPERHEAD

Anyway, talking about "Copperhead." Jeff Wilson beat me to saying part of what I want to say about the "New President" and the oddness of the timeline traced by Roy.

My sense, and I've only read the story one time, is that there is indeed something odd about the president: that he is "new," and his "newness" is not due to having just been elected. Something other than that.

My feeling as I was reading was that he was perhaps some sort of usurper and/or doppelganger and/or otherwise unelected-to-the-Presidency. The "easiest" solution to all this seemed related to the alien dingus: that he had somehow used it to make himself president (yet he was seemingly already president when he got the dingus, so it couldn't have been at that moment without some serious timewarping going on). The other possibilities are: the executive branch has been lost through accident or assassination, and the "new" president is the umpteenth in line, a freshman politician who now finds himself in the position; or, the president is a doppelganger, that is, he has already been beamed with the dingus on one of the other settings, and the "new" president is an alien in a human body. All those little notes to himself about projecting human qualities, they sound to me like either a freshman or an alien, not like a seasoned politician who does these things second nature, without thinking.

Granted the NP does talk about the inauguration, so he has been in some kind of public ceremony.

As for the timeline: my strong sense was that the Constitution has been suspended; the nation is in a state of emergency, martial law, perhaps even a new War Between the States. If the situation is as bad as I suggest, then it is obvious to everyone that there won't be an election in four years, and nobody expects "life as usual" to go on until the crisis is resolved. There is talk about a fire in Idaho that cut short the presidential vacation. (The old president and others could have been killed in a fertilizer/fuel bombing--are you getting the contemporary details here?)

Funny thing about the title: I immediately thought of the snake. But the way that the new president is fixated on that maple tree, and the way that the goddess's hair is red, it made me think that she was a dryad (or "maple-maiden," in this case) rather than a snake. But then, in the end, bamm, she's a snake: just like the convolutions between text and title of "The Game in the Pope's Head" (a Wolfe story in Dozois' anthology RIPPER!!)

Next item: the dead boys. Since there has just been a suicide (with a weird Vince Foster feel to it), I supposed that the suicide was related to Copperhead herself (and her dalliance with the

new president has a Monica feel to it, no?). That is, she told him no more, and so he hanged himself. And either he, or some other guy, had killed the first guy to know Copperhead "in the Biblical sense": that was the other dead boy.

Rewind a bit: recall how the new president wasn't the first to have the dingus--the general was (? maybe someone before =him= was the likely first weilder of the dingus?), and he was very reluctant to hand it over. So it seems likely that one or more buttons have already been pushed. And the new president says something like "sometimes something obvious happens, sometimes not," which made it seem to me that there had been a certain amount of experimentation going on. Point here being that maybe the general's fooling around with it elevated the other fellow to the presidency. Or it set loose a bunch of monsters that are now ravaging the USA (rather like Wolfe's bioengineered centaur in America stories, but less THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS and more "Calling All Monsters").

Is the national crisis triggered by the dingus, or was the crisis in full bloom and the dingus showed up?

Alex, answering Paul, wrote:

What's with the barking trees and winding ram's horns?

I assume that's just Wolfe's way of saying "he's a in a very weird cognate of our reality."

I agree. I was reminded of the weird other world in George Macdonald's LILITH; that degree of weirdness. But is NP from Earth, or is he now coming home again, or is he from the other place and now visiting the third universe (a grand tour)?

I read the story one time, these are notes of my impressions.

=mantis=

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