

Copperhead

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 19 May 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2653>

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James Jordan — 19 May 2001, 13:39

Having been away for three weeks, I now play catchup.

I think the Lilith business is right. Of course, it is not in the Bible, and has nothing to do with Christian doctrine. (It's manichaeism basically: Good Adam and Bad Lilith.) But the myth is around, in MacDonald, and Wolfe is familiar with it. It seems clear enough that the gadget switched an earthly copperhead with a parallel-universe Lilith, and then the NEW president with a NEW and unfallen Adam. Still president of the Garden, and the very image of God, this unfallen Adam pronounces a divine curse upon Lilith.

No, this is not a post-fall Adam who still has much strength. This is an unfallen Adam who thinks the way God thinks, and does what God would do, and did do in Genesis 3.

Boone has killed himself, and there has been a significant murder also (p.

4). It seems clear that Boone has been getting it on with Lilith, and the murder is also connected to her. These, not Cain and Abel, are the two men who have died. Boone killed the other man; Boone was the murderer. As others have noted, the story of Cain and Abel comes after the Fall, and so it is not directly in view here. Indirectly, though, it is relevant: Abel challenged Cain for his sin, and Cain murdered him. We might assume that the murdered man challenged Boone for his adulterous relationship with Lilith, and Boone murdered him for that reason, though more likely Boone killed him in a jealous rage for having sex with Lilith (see below). The New President knows that Boone's note will say both that he murdered the man (which has been covered up by Rance -- implied) and also will tell about Jane Doe, so the note must be suppressed.

Back to Cain and Abel: that's in THIS world, and Cains have been murdering Abel for thousands of years. That's the implied allusion. I don't think there is any allusion to a Cain and Abel in the parallel, unfallen world. All Lilith has in mind is Boone and the murdered man.

I note some significant language on p. 3:

Rance says, "Find who, Mr. President?"

"Who the HELL do you think?"

"Jane Doe?"

"You're watching her, or you're DAMNED well supposed to be."

"We are." Rance said.

"A HELL of a lot of good it did...."

I think that's all the profanity in the story, which makes its presence here significant.

Location: The action takes place in the west, not in DC. The NP says on p. 6, "I'll be going back tomorrow, and when I get back I'll make a slot for you...." Going back where? To DC. Also, the five-hour trip of Rance & Co. gets them to the NP at 11:00 pm, while the NP's wife is back in Washington. Thus, the house and the hill are out west somewhere. It's near "Three Mile Woods" (p. 9), wherever that is (I don't find any such place on-line). I'm sure Wolfe had some Reason for this western location, but I don't come up with anything.

More: the hilltop is near a meadow. There are two trees, one fallen. The fallen tree is the Tree of Life, which can be considered fallen in this world since we are now under the curse of death.

The standing tree is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, associated with the serpent.

Note the repeated reference to its leaves falling, and plug in the word "fall" and its larger meaning.

Chronology: The spring trip back to the West, and the fall trip back to the West to watch football (p. 7) happened during the year of campaigning, not after the NP was inaugurated, yet that the NP was already president in the fall when he met with General Martens. But I don't think we have to imagine a parallel world or a disaster in the US. People burning things in Spokane is nothing more than the Los Angeles riots or the activities of environmentalists in Seattle -- nothing apocalyptic. I just think the NP had become president before his first run for office, and had been VP when the former president died or resigned.

More: I don't see any reason to believe General Martens pushed any buttons before he gave the gadget to the NP. He found it right away, phoned the NP immediately, and the NP told him to bring it to him immediately. I think Martens did not want to give it up just because he suspected it was a dangerous alien device and either (a) wanted to keep it for study, or (b) wanted to protect the NP from blowing himself up, or (c) any combination of the above.

I take "groose" as "grouse." At first I thought it was Lilith's complain against the unfallen Adam of her original world. He did not like her behavior. But in context, it seems to refer to Boone, and then to her rejection of him ("you will never grunt over me again"). Her rejection of Boone precipitated his suicide. What did Boone grouse about? Her relations with other men, including the man Boone murdered.

The weird world the NP comes to is just the unfallen world, when human beings can still hear creation singing.

Finally, I don't think we should try to read a lot of Clinton into this story. Like all of us, Wolfe can hardly avoid Clinton and his misbehavior, but there is no reason to think the NP is a serial adulterer, or that he wants to seduce Karen. He's just a fallen Adam, both in the sense of being a sinner and in the sense of being in charge of the world (as the president of the US is). The only dark hint I got was that perhaps he intends to have Karen killed, to clean up the mess: "I know you've done your best...I want you to understand that...no matter what happens tonight" (p. 5). I got this hint because Wolfe spends so much time on the conversation with Karen, which seems otherwise unimportant. The NP thinks to give her a post in Labor, and then says he'll make her an ambassador. What does he really plan for her, if anything?

Thus, my take (for now).

Nutria

Kevin J. Maroney — 23 May 2001, 15:14 · follows James Jordan

At 01:39 PM 5/19/01 -0500, Nutria wrote:

(It's manichaeian basically: Good Adam and Bad Lilith.)

There is nothing distinctively Manichean about having a Completely Good Thing and a corresponding Completely Bad Thing. That idea shows up in all sorts of places, including all of the Abrahamist monotheisms.

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Michael Straight — 23 May 2001, 22:44 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

On Wed, 23 May 2001, Kevin J. Maroney wrote:

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Is this a joke? That's the very thing that Christians have always used to say "Manichaeism is not us." Satan is the opposite of Michael the Archangel; there is no counterpart Bad Thing that

is the opposite of God. God created everything, and some things are warped, but to the extent Satan has any good thing (intelligence, existence, charisma) it is simply a warped version of the good thing God gave him. Nothing in orthodox Christianity or Judaism gives you the sense that Evil is a real rival to God that might have a chance of ultimately winning.

-Rostrum

Kevin J. Maroney — 24 May 2001, 11:23 · follows Michael Straight

At 10:44 PM 5/23/01 -0400, Rostrum wrote:

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I agree with all of that, but the last time I checked, Adam was not God. The major theological distinction between the Abrahamist religions and the religion of Mani is at the level of a dark equivalent to God. The Abrahamist religions all posit the existence of completely evil things which exist as mirrors to good things less than God. Calling "Good Adam, Bad Lilith" "Manichaeism" seems to me a misunderstanding of both the Abrahamist religions and Mani's religion, since it ascribes a common practice of the former group to being solely the province of the latter.

I suppose there would be ways for an Abrahamist "Good Adam, Bad Lilith" pair to be more Manichaeism--if, for instance, Lilith were *created* by Satan to subvert and destroy Adam--but if such a tradition exists, I'm unaware of it. All of the versions of Lilith I've encountered have her created by the Good God and then wander astray (much like Adam himself, of course, but for some reason it is not assumed that the children of Adam are all demons).

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Michael Straight — 24 May 2001, 11:59 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

On Thu, 24 May 2001, Kevin J. Maroney wrote:

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Ok, I see your point. My only disagreement is that Christians in the tradition of Augustine and Aquinas would deny that Lilith or Satan could be "completely evil" (nor Adam "completely good"), which is what set me off. I agree that "Good Adam, Bad Lilith" is not necessarily Manichaeism, if you don't read it in the "completely good vs. completely evil" sense.

-Rostrum