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The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 24 Jun 2001

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BraveSaintCroix — 24 Jun 2001, 17:19

The thing about the New Sun book that had always bugged me was the whole concept of getting a person's memories by eating a piece of them. Perhaps silly in context with some of the other miracles in the book, but it always seemed ridiculous to me. (It also bugged me in Herbert's later Dune books that a clone, or gholia, could have its original's memories from just a few cells. . .) Anyway, maybe this has already been discussed, but I found an interesting article in a book of "fantastic facts" that pertains to it:

During experiments conducted in 1962 at the University of Michigan, scientists successfully extracted memory from one animal and transferred it to another. The experiment was conducted in the following manner. Over a period of time planarian worms were trained to behave in a particular way when exposed to light. These worms were then cut into pieces and fed to untrained planarians, and the untrained worms were put through the same learning paces as their predecessors. The second batch of worms, those that had dined on the first, learned many times faster than the originals, indicating that knowledge had somehow been transferred through body tissue. Similar experiments were later conducted at Baylor University: mice were trained to run through a maze, and an extract was then made of their brains. This extract was fed to untrained mice, which then learned the same maze twice as fast as their predecessors. If placed in a different maze, the untrained mice showed no particular aptitude for learning the layout. The implication of these experiments is that memory can be transferred from one being to another somatically as well as experimentally.

. . . Fascinating.

-Steve

James Jordan — 24 Jun 2001, 22:50 · follows BraveSaintCroix

At 01:19 PM 6/24/2001 -0400, you wrote:

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During experiments conducted in 1962 at the University of Michigan, scientists successfully extracted memory from one animal and transferred it to another.

Wolfe may have had these experiments a bit in mind, but he's mainly dealing with the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion, which links believers with Christ and through Him with the whole body of saints, dead and alive, as believers in a mystery eat the flesh and drink the blood of their Savior. There are also a whole slew of baptisms in the New Sun books, beginning with

young Severian's first death and resurrection. So actually, in context of the book, these are the main miracles.

Nutria

Michael Straight — 25 Jun 2001, 12:57 · follows James Jordan

On Sun, 24 Jun 2001, James Jordan wrote:

Wolfe may have had these experiments a bit in mind, but he's mainly dealing with the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion

I would have put it the other way around. Wolfe is probably also refering to Holy Communion, but the idea of getting memories from somehow consuming someone else's brains/RNA is an old sci-fi/fantasy trope, the RNA versions have generally been inspired by that planarial worm experiment, I think. (Larry Niven used injections of RNA to allow people to learn new skills in A World Out of Time -- that's the only one I can remember off the top of my head.)

(Of course, the original fantasy/magical versions of this idea may have themselves been inspired by the Eucharist...)

-Rostrum