

Seventeen

The Urth list — 9 messages, 7 voices, 27 Mar 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3100>

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Michael Straight — 27 Mar 2002, 17:01

I recently found out that another SF writer is enamored of the number seventeen: apparently most of Steven Brust's novels have 17 chapters (starting with the first Dragaera novel, which features a society with 17 "Houses").

So what is it about 17 that Wolfe and Brust (and others?) might latch on to it? That it is prime? Fondness for magazines like Sassy and YM?

Are there older traditions that see importance in the number 17 (like Christians with 3, 7, and 12?)

-Rostrum

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 27 Mar 2002, 17:08 · follows Michael Straight

Well, 17 is a big number for Discordians (also 5 and 23).

-----Original Message-----

From: Michael Straight [mailto:straight at email.unc.edu] Sent: Wednesday, March 27, 2002 9:02 AM To: urth Subject: (urth) Seventeen

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San Martin, Gonzalo — 27 Mar 2002, 17:12 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

See <http://pages.globetrotter.net/sdesr/nu17.htm> for a multitude of significances (biblical and otherwise) of the number seventeen.

Gonzalo

-----Original Message-----

From: Dan'I Danehy-Oakes [mailto:ddanehy at siebel.com]
Sent: 27 March 2002 17:08

To: 'urth at urth.net'
Subject: RE: (urth) Seventeen

Well, 17 is a big number for Discordians (also 5 and 23).

-----Original Message-----

From: Michael Straight [mailto:straight at email.unc.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, March 27, 2002 9:02 AM
To: urth
Subject: (urth) Seventeen

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Michael Straight — 27 Mar 2002, 17:18 · follows San Martin, Gonzalo

On Wed, 27 Mar 2002, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Well, 17 is a big number for Discordians (also 5 and 23).

Heh. Googling Discordians and 17 found this quote:

The crazies aside, though, it's the utterly boring, uncreative people who see a stupid theme and latch on then run it into the ground that are the worst. OMG THAT LICENSE PLATE HAS A 23 IN IT! HAIL ERIS! I remember Crosley Bendix talking about how if you concentrate on a certain number hard enough, you'll start to notice it everywhere. As a side note, he said "Try it with your favorite number. If you don't have a favorite number, you can use mine - 17." And 17 is my favorite number, which caused me to be surprised and tingly. But I have yet to say HAIL CROSLEY BENDIX or otherwise engage in jackassery. Well, jackassery related to that event, at least.

-Rostrum

Michael Straight — 27 Mar 2002, 17:26 · follows Michael Straight

On Wed, 27 Mar 2002, San Martin, Gonzalo wrote:
See <http://pages.globetrotter.net/sdesr/nu17.htm> for a multitude of significances (biblical and otherwise) of the number seventeen.

Thanks! From that page:

Shakespeare wrote 17 comedies.

Beethoven wrote 17 quartets.

The age of the universe is about 10^{17} seconds.

There are 17 muscles in the tongue.

The Japanese poetry Haiku contains 17 syllables.

The mass of Neptune is 17 times that of the Earth.

The girls having 17 years old, have on average 17 square meters of skin.

No wonder Wolfe likes that number!

-Rostrum

Michael Andre-Driussi — 27 Mar 2002, 19:14 · follows Michael Straight

I believe that 17 was an unlucky number to the Romans, and they got it from the Etruscans. (Robert Graves, I, CLAUDIUS, probably.)

The Group of 17 (Asian leadership in TBOTNS) is said by Wolfe to be based on the typical number of members in a Soviet politburo, iirc.

The "Seventeen Stones" called out at the Sanguinary Fields (TBOTNS) is very likely a coded allusion to the Group of 17.

At the more personal level, Gene Wolfe was in the first battalion of the 17th Infantry in Korea (LETTERS HOME, as I understand it).

=mantis=

Jerry Friedman — 27 Mar 2002, 21:57 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

--- Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu> wrote:

I recently found out that another SF writer is enamored of the number seventeen: apparently most of Steven Brust's novels have 17 chapters (starting with the first Dragaera novel, which features a society with 17 "Houses").

For what looks like the full story on Brust and 17, see
<<http://world.std.com/~mam/Cracks-and-Shards/seventeen.html>>.

So what is it about 17 that Wolfe and Brust (and others?) might latch on to it? That it is prime? Fondness for magazines like Sassy and YM?

In college, I took a course in mathematical logic from Paul Benacerraf. Whenever he did a numerical example in his lucid and interesting lectures, he would say something like, "Take an arbitrary number-- seventeen, for instance." Finally a student asked him why it was always 17, and he gave a parodic proof that 17 is the most arbitrary number. So it shows up in all kinds of strange places.

By the way, I like Steven Brust's sf a lot, even though it's not much like Wolfe's.

Jerry Friedman

James Jordan — 27 Mar 2002, 22:46 · follows Jerry Friedman

At 11:12 AM 3/27/2002, you wrote:

See <http://pages.globetrotter.net/sdesr/nu17.htm> for a multitude of significances (biblical and otherwise) of the number seventeen.

Correction to the above: The 17 nations are in Acts 2, not Romans 2.

Otherwise, there are a number of occurrences of 17 in the Bible, particularly in the Psalter.

Books 3 and 4 of the Psalter each have 17 psalms, for instance. But as with the 17 nations, these occurrences are not obvious unless you take the time to count or calculate. The 153 fishes

of John 21 are the triangular of 17, which for those of you who don't know, is

$17+16+15+14...+1$. Lay out 17 dots, then below it 16, below that 15, etc., and you get a triangle. That's ancient math, not "modern math"! (666, btw, is the triangular of 36 [=6x6].)

Cool, huh?

The number adds 7 and 10, both of which are numbers of completeness or totality in the bible. Added together, they form a symbol of complete completeness.

Who knows where Wolfe "got" it? He might have been thinking of 17

as $7 + 10$, as above; or something else entirely. Unless he's a more avid Bible scholar than I think he is, I doubt if anything else from the Bible is in view. (Though I bet he'd really get off on those triangular numbers!)

Patera Nutria

Jeff Wilson — 28 Mar 2002, 05:44 · follows James Jordan

From: James Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net>

See <http://pages.globetrotter.net/sdesr/nu17.htm> for a multitude of significances (biblical and otherwise) of the number seventeen.

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There is a touch of 17 in the MIT-centric engineering culture:

< <http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/jargon/html/entry/random-numbers.html> >

Jeff Wilson

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