

Blues vs Greens

The Urth list — 8 messages, 6 voices, 18 Apr 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3167>

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Andrew Bollen — 18 Apr 2002, 08:52

After a few failed attempts to subscribe - Ha! Mainframe at last! Now to integrate ...

Blue and Green whorls had me thinking of Blue & Green factions in the Roman & Byzantine worlds. Originally the colors of different chariot racing teams in the circus, and by extension their fans, the "colors" became established as part of the state during the Gleichhaltungen of the later empire & early Byzantine times. Merged with the claques of the theater, the fan factions had the ceremonial function of praising the emperor during his public appearances.

Over hundreds of years, throughout the empire, Blues & Greens would periodically erupt into factional violence against each other, causing widespread death & destruction. Modern analyses generally eschew attempts to tag class, religious or other "objective" division onto this rivalry. If you were a Blue, you supported the noble Blues against the contemptible Greens, and vice versa. Not class warfare, but soccer hooliganism, on a large, empire-wide scale, from the Emperor on downwards.

"The population in every city has for a long been divided into two groups, the Greens and the Blues ... The members of each faction fight with their opponents not knowing for what reason they risk their lives, but realizing full well that even when they vanquish their opponents in brawls, they will be carted off to prison and that, after they have suffered the most extreme tortures, they will be killed. ... Neither human nor divine affairs matter to them compared to winning these fights. When some impious act is committed by one of them against God, or when the laws and the state are injured by their comrades or opponents, or perhaps when they lack the necessities of life, or their country is suffering dire need, they ignore all this as long as events turn out well for their own "faction." For this is what they call the bands of rioters. ... And this is how things are among the people of every city." (Procopius)

Blues vs Greens to me are emblematic of the human tendency to form divisions, for the sake of forming divisions. One of the themes of TBOTLS and TBOTSS is, I think, the problem of achieving good governance in the face of this tendency. The inhumani are an externalization and a mirror of divisiveness, which makes them stronger & will lead to the extinction of humans on the whorls, unless a solution is found.

No idea whether Wolfe intended this kind of imagery or parallel, but it's nice to think about. Taking it a little further, apart from Blues and Greens, all through this period the chariot teams included Red and White. In a way which does not seem all together clear, White was a junior partner to Blue, and Red to Green. In the extension beyond teams to fan factions, Red and White therefore did not make an appearance as separate divisions.

But it's perhaps possible to see a reflection in Wolfe - White is the color of the Long Sun Whorl (it is described as "white" when viewed from Blue at some point), and Red is of course Urth. The pairing of Green/Urth and Whorl/Blue make some kind of sense to me: each of the former pair in desperate straits, each of the latter just needing some hard work to set right.

Finally: did Wolfe have a story years ago about an Army experiment gone wrong - a group of men isolated for a long period, splitting into two parties (Blue & Green?) and fighting each other to the death?

- AB

Andy Robertson — 18 Apr 2002, 10:51 · follows Andrew Bollen

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

From: Andrew Bollen

Blues vs Greens to me are emblematic of the human tendency to form divisions, for the sake of forming divisions. One of the themes of TBOTLS and TBOTSS is, I think, the problem of achieving good governance in the face of this tendency. The inhumani are an externalization and a mirror of divisiveness, which makes them stronger & will lead to the extinction of humans on the whorls, unless a solution is found.

Very interesting post indeed.

One point, which does not exactly contradict what you say, but supplements it; Wolfe is strongly pro "divisions" in humanity. He is distinctly anti-Universalist.

That this is one of the fundamental messages of the books.

In TBOTNS his pattern for a Universalist society are the Ascians, where communism and socialism have indeed removed all human racial and class "divisions".

The Commonwealth, contrasted to this, is apparently divided and weak, but in fact alive and strong, because it consists of organic tribal and racial communities, not an anonymous mass of cannon fodder.

hartshorn

Andrew Bollen — 18 Apr 2002, 10:58 · follows Andy Robertson

One point, which does not exactly contradict what you say, but supplements it; Wolfe is strongly pro "divisions" in humanity. He is distinctly anti-Universalist.

You're right, of course. I mean "factions", subgroups warring for no reason other than factionality, rather than substantive "divisions" such as, say, Good vs Bad. Wolfe sure ain't Ghandi!

Michael Straight — 18 Apr 2002, 13:26 · follows Andrew Bollen

On Thu, 18 Apr 2002, Andrew Bollen wrote:
Blue and Green whorls had me thinking of Blue & Green factions in the Roman & Byzantine worlds.

Wow. How is it I've never heard of this? What years would this be? Extremely fascinating!

Finally: did Wolfe have a story years ago about an Army experiment gone wrong - a group of men isolated for a long period, splitting into two parties (Blue & Green?) and fighting each other to the death?

You're thinking of "When I Was Ming the Merciless." I believe that in the story there were four colors--Yellow, Blue, Green, and Red--and that the color divisions were an original part of the experiment. "Ming" was, I think, part of the Yellow group.

-Rostrum

James Jordan — 18 Apr 2002, 13:50 · follows Michael Straight

On Thu, 18 Apr 2002, Andrew Bollen wrote:

Blue and Green whorls had me thinking of Blue & Green factions in the Roman & Byzantine worlds.

Given Wolfe's research into Byzantium for the Severian Quintet, surely he knew all about this. Thus, you may well be onto something. OTOH, planet with vegetation and water on them will look either bluish or greenish from space, and one would think that is the primary source of the terminology.

Nutria

Andrew Bollen — 18 Apr 2002, 14:54 · follows James Jordan

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

From: "Michael Straight" <straight at email.unc.edu>

Wow. How is it I've never heard of this? What years would this be?

The team colors went back as early as anyone discover in Roman (pre-Imperial) history. The factions became an important factor (so to speak) around the 5th century, and continued to be a problem for several hundred years. The most notorious incident involving the factions was the Nika Riot in Justinian's reign - a general pillaging of Constantinople, many deaths. This is a link to a (probably) verbatim transcript of a dispute between representatives of the Greens & Blues before Justinian in the circus (or theater?), possibly at the commencement of the riots, tho others say it should be dated earlier.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/theophanes-chron1.html>

IMO it's one of the most bizarre historical documents out there.

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-Rostrum

Thanks!

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 18 Apr 2002, 16:02 · follows Andrew Bollen

Andrew (Welcome!) Bollen wrote:

Blue and Green whorls had me thinking of Blue & Green factions in the Roman & Byzantine worlds....

(etc.)

Omigod. It's the Drazi.

"Green!"

"Purple!"

"Green!"

"Purple!"

(H'mmmm... "Truth is a three-edged sword" sounds very
Lupine, doesn't it?)

Michael Andre-Driussi — 18 Apr 2002, 16:20 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Welcome aboard, Andrew Bollen.

On the topic of Blue and Green factions . . .

About ten or twelve years ago I asked Gene Wolfe whether there were Blue/Green style factions in Nessus, in the armiger quarters to the north. I asked this because as Severian walked up that way he saw people wearing silks, and the colors were red and yellow, iirc. This was a sudden riot of color. The bringing up of silk had as much connection to Byzantium as the suggestion of color factions.

In response, Gene Wolfe told me that no, they were not factions; and he did not have an opinion as to whether the autarch's government had a monopoly on silk or not.

=mantis=

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