

War With The Ascians as a Proxy War?

The Urth list — 7 messages, 4 voices, 01 Jan 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3297>

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Andrew Reeves — 07 Jun 2002, 02:10

First off, I'd just like to say hello, being a newcomer to the list. That said, I've scanned the archives and didn't notice anything on the following sentiment.

The more I look at it, it seems to me that the war between the Commonwealth and the Ascians in TBOTNS is something of a "proxy war" between the giants and the angels (or whatever Tzadkiel is). After all, Urth being fairly technically backwards, both sides need to import their weapons. Since Erebus, Abaia, and company are arming the Ascians, and the "good" aliens are arming the armies of the Autarch, I can't see it as anything more than the two sides duking it out with human soldiers. I mean, they talk a good game, telling the autarch that he's the rightful ruler of urth, but it still makes the autarch look like more of a pawn than any kind of rightful ruler should be.

Does Wolfe want us to assume that the angelic beings have our best interests at heart, or is there more to it?

While on the subject of the Commonwealth's alien allies, I found something else peculiar. Wolfe is a Catholic, and from _Long_ and _Short Sun_ we can glean that the Increate/Outsider/Pancreator is the Holy Trinity (see especially Silk's enlightenment and its inclusion of Jesus being taken off the cross). So why on earth do we have an angel riding around as the captain of spaceships? It seems like a pretty cool ship and all, but why bother with the spaceship at all?

Just some thoughts I was hoping the group could give some input on.

Andrew

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 07 Jun 2002, 15:49 · follows Andrew Reeves

Welcom, Andrew Reeves. Hiss, click click.

You wrote:

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While I'd not thought of it in those terms, I guess you could in fact describe it that way. But then, from the Catholic point of view (which is, as you point out, Wolfe's as well as mine own), the whole world is a "proxy war" between God/the angels and Satan/the devils. This is one of the primary roles in the Roman Catholic Church's (RCC's) self-description: we are the Church Militant. This "proxy war" is generally held to take place primarily on the "battleground" of the individual human soul, and in this form is referred to as "spiritual warfare;" but on occasion, it is clearly externalized. Not only in obvious ways, like the proper Crusades, but activities such as the late Mother Teresa's Calcutta mission would also be considered an external manifestation of the activity of the Church Militant.

After all, Urth being fairly technically backwards, both sides need to import their weapons. Since Erebus, Abaia, and company are arming the Ascians, and the "good" aliens are arming the armies of the Autarch, I can't see it as anything more than the two sides duking it out with human soldiers. I mean, they talk a good game, telling the autarch that he's the rightful ruler of Urth, but it still makes the autarch look like more of a pawn than any kind of rightful ruler should be.

Well, now, here we have an additional aspect: I would suggest strongly that Wolfe is drawing upon his own experiences in one of the proxy wars that (in my opinion) constituted WWII: he was a soldier in the Korean "police action," which was, of course, just such a proxy war between the US and the CCCP. Much of what you say applies, or has been claimed to apply, to the proxy wars in which Ivan met G.I. Joe (two points for the reference). For example, critics claimed that the rulers of the proxy nations were puppets of the principals -- of course, each of the principals claimed that their ally was the "legitimate government" and the other's ally was a puppet and a stalking horse for the other principal's aggression. And, of course, each principal provided its ally/puppet with munitions and "military advisors."

But we can also apply this at the level of the angels/devils proxy war. Analogically speaking, the RCC point of view says that each human person begins as a state with a legitimate and independent government ("soul" and "free will") which is, however, suborned almost from its inception by the side the RCC ("original sin") would consider the Evil Empire. The Good Guys provide assistance in the form of arms ("grace") and advice (scripture, dogma, etc.). The individual state is expected to do as much of his/her own fighting as s/he can, but the RCC recognizes that at certain critical times, direct intervention by the principal may be required. A mechanism for communication with the principal, including requests for aid, has been provided ("prayer"); further, each individual state is both enabled and expected to help other embattled states ("the communion of saints") who are joined in a grand alliance ("the Church Militant") against the Enemy. The continued presence of enemy agents in the government causes the state to perform some acts against its best interest; with allied aid, the state is to seek continually to root out and expel these agents ("self-examination," "confession," "penitence").

Goodness, that was a bit more long-winded than I intended... my apologies. Onward:

Does Wolfe want us to assume that the angelic beings have our best interests at heart, or is there more to it?

I do not have a clear answer to that, but can answer a variation on the question: I think Wolfe clearly wants us to assume that, whatever the motives of the angelic beings may be, humanity's best interests are best served by allying with the hieros.

While on the subject of the Commonwealth's alien allies, I found something else peculiar. Wolfe is a Catholic, and from _Long_ and _Short Sun_ we can glean that the Increate/Outsider/Pancreator is the Holy Trinity (see especially Silk's enlightenment and its inclusion of Jesus being taken off the cross). So why on earth do we have an angel riding around as the captain of spaceships? It seems like a pretty cool ship and all, but why bother with the spaceship at all?

...because:

(1) this is a science fiction story, after all, and Wolfe goes out of his way to provide stfnal explanations for the miraculous. (2) the ship isn't for Tzadkiel's benefit (in fact, if I recall correctly, the ship is a manifestaton of Tzadkiel), but for the benefit of the passengers and crew.

Crush — 07 Jun 2002, 18:21 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Hey, I'm also new. The Acian War **could** be thought of as a proxy war, but it could just as easily be viewed as a resistance war against an occupying force. If there is any correlation between the Acian War and the War of Heaven, THAT is certainly closer to the way I've always viewed my Christian participation. Actually the word "pagan" (according to Henry Chadwick) was a Roman military term for "civilian"-so a pagan was one who had yet to become involved in the war.

In this light, the Acians could be viewed as a fifth column brigade. The hieros seem to view themselves as our "descendents". Who knows the true pedigree of Erebus and Abaia? The Hieros seem likely to have a better claim to having a legitimate stake in Urth than they do. I've always seen the Hieros as protecting mankind's legitimate destiny from invaders trying to supplant it with their own vision. Am I off-base?

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

From: Dan'I Danehy-Oakes [mailto:ddanehy at siebel.com] Sent: Friday, June 07, 2002 10:50 AM
To: 'urth at urth.net' Subject: RE: (urth) War With The Ascians as a Proxy War?

Welcom, Andrew Reeves. Hiss, click click.

You wrote:

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independent government ("soul" and "free will") which is, however, suborned almost from its inception by the side the RCC ("original sin") would consider the Evil Empire. The Good Guys provide assistance in the form of arms ("grace") and advice (scripture, dogma, etc.). The individual state is expected to do as much of his/her own fighting as s/he can, but the RCC recognizes that at certain critical times, direct intervention by the principal may be required. A mechanism for communication with the principal, including requests for aid, has been provided ("prayer"); further, each individual state is both enabled and expected to help other embattled states ("the communion of saints") who are joined in a grand alliance ("the Church Militant") against the Enemy. The continued presence of enemy agents in the government causes the state to perform some acts against its best interest; with allied aid, the state is to seek continually to root out and expel these agents ("self-examination," "confession," "penitence").

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Andrew Reeves — 09 Jun 2002, 00:58 · follows Crush

Responding to two different replies:

Crush wrote:

Hey, I'm also new. The Acian War **could** be thought of as a proxy war, but it could just as easily be viewed as a resistance war against an occupying force.

That makes sense, as could the interpretation that the Ascians are somewhat equivalent to, say Communist revolutionaries who are trying to supplant the rightful rulers of Urth with their (well, actually, the giants') own twisted totalitarianism. So maybe the Autarchs' wars could be seen as a counter insurgency, as it were.

If there is any correlation between the Acian War and the War of Heaven, THAT is certainly closer to the way I've always viewed my Christian participation. Actually the word "pagan" (according to Henry Chadwick) was a Roman military term for "civilian"-so a pagan was one who had yet to become involved in the war.

I'm going to throw in a bit of pedantry here. The origin of "pagan" came from "paganus" meaning "rube" or "rustic." Since Christianity started in the cities, eventually, the term for country dweller came to be associated with that of those who still clung to the old rites.

In this light, the Acians could be viewed as a fifth column brigade. The hieros seem to view themselves as our "descendents". Who knows the true pedigree of Erebus and Abaia? The Hieros seem likely to have a better claim to having a legitimate stake in Urth than they do. I've always seen the Hieros as protecting mankind's legitimate destiny from invaders trying to supplant it with their own vision.

Well, as far as I understand it, that's the case. Indeed, the more I think about it, that seems to be seen as the case on Urth as well. Even Agia could see that submitting to the Ascian way of life would be a very Bad Thing. Indeed, given that the whole nature of the Ascians seems so deeply wrong, it is actually rather doubtful as to how the giants sold their ancestors on the whole deal anyway. I think Vodalus provides us an answer, though. The giants offer all kinds of shiny techno-toys and a stable system that is free of strife. By the time it's been implemented, though, it's too late to go back and you're the brainwashed slave of an aquatic giant.

Welcom, Andrew Reeves. Hiss, click click.

Is the above sound effect to indicate the airlock closing behind me? :)

<snip excellent analogy of Ascian War as a parallel to earthly warfare of devils and angels>

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That brings up another thought. The Ascians are definitely baddies.

But if

Erebus is, say Kim Il Song, it leaves the question as to whether or not there have been Autarchs with less than a stellar character, say Pak Choong Hi's to Erebus. I mean, granted, they've got something of a de facto conscience in that there's a ton of voices inside their heads giving them all kinds of advice, but what about the occasional bad apple? If one wanted to take the spiritual analogy further, one can note that there have been bad clergy and some rotten popes, even though the cause was still just.

While on the subject of the Commonwealth's alien allies, I found something else peculiar. Wolfe is a Catholic, and from _Long_ and _Short Sun_ we can glean that the Increate/Outsider/Pancreator is the Holy Trinity (see especially Silk's enlightenment and its inclusion of Jesus being taken off the cross). So why on earth do we have an angel riding around as the captain of spaceships? It seems like a pretty cool ship and all, but why bother with the spaceship at all?

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The second especially makes a great deal of sense. After all, OT angels appear in fiery chariots even though they don't exactly need chariots to get them from place to place.

Thanks for the input.

Andrew

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 10 Jun 2002, 17:52 · follows Andrew Reeves

Welcome, Crush.

You wrote...

Hey, I'm also new. The Acian War **could** be thought of as a proxy war, but it could just as easily be viewed as a resistance war against an occupying force. If there is any correlation between the Acian War and the War of Heaven, THAT is certainly closer to the way I've always viewed my Christian participation.

Right. A big help with understanding this concept when I was much younger was John Donne's sonnet "Batter my heart, three-person'd God," which is one of the most vivid presentations of "spiritual warfare" and the fight to retake the "occupied" territory of the human soul, which I have ever encountered.

Actually the word "pagan" (according to Henry Chadwick) was a Roman military term for "civilian"-so a pagan was one who had yet to become involved in the war.

I am not knowing from Henry Chadwick. Merriam-Webster's online gives this for the etymology of Pagan:

Middle English, from Late Latin *paganus*, from Latin, country dweller, from *pagus* country district; akin to Latin *pangere* to fix -- more at PACT

Under PACT, we find this:

Middle English, from Middle French, from Latin *pactum*, from neuter of *pactus*, past participle of *pacisci* to agree, contract; akin to Old English *fOn* to seize, Latin *pax* peace, *pangere* to fix, fasten, Greek *pEgnynai*

So, wow: "pagan" turns out to be related to "peace." But, more to the point, Andrew's "bit of pedantry" seems to be pretty accurate.

Which doesn't really make any problems with this:

In this light, the Acians could be viewed as a fifth column brigade. The hieros seem to view themselves as our "descendents". Who knows the true pedigree of Erebus and Abaia?

Well, right. There's hints in tBotNS that they're alien, though I can't recall an explicit statement on the subject. TBotSS seems to suggest that Scylla, at least, is related to the "Mother" of Blue.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 10 Jun 2002, 18:42 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Andrew responded to Crush...

Even Agia could see that submitting to the Ascian way of life would be a very Bad Thing. Indeed, given that the whole nature of the Ascians seems so deeply wrong, it is actually rather doubtful as to how the giants sold their ancestors on the whole deal anyway.

Well, an important point, which should not be glossed over, is Severian's experience with Loyal to the Group of Seventeen. It's clear that, despite the breeding for docility and superior mind control techniques available to the rulers of Ascians, the human spirit, so to speak, perseveres. The Ascians are not utterly-lost minions of Hell; they are citizens of a system/state that appears to us to be worse than that of the Commonwealth -- but its appearance to us is based on information filtered through the perceptions of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

I think, in fact, it's safe to say that Mr Wolfe would regard the system of the Commonwealth as "better" than that of Ascia; but we have to be careful not to take that to mean that the system of the Commonwealth is "good" or the system of Ascia "evil" -- just that the Commonwealth is less evil than Ascia.

(Nonetheless, the relationship between the Autarchs and the Hieros does seem to suggest that there is a literalizing of the "divine right of kings" theory going on here.)

I think Vodalus provides us an answer, though. The giants offer all kinds of shiny techno-toys and a stable system that is free of strife. By the time it's been implemented, though, it's too late to go back and you're the brainwashed slave of an aquatic giant.

Well, they also offer power for the few. Not an inducement to be despised.

Then he responded to me:

Welcom, Andrew Reeves. Hiss, click click.

Is the above sound effect to indicate the airlock closing behind me? :)

No, just a traditional blattidaean greeting.

That brings up another thought. The Ascians are definitely baddies. But if Erebus is, say Kim II Song,

Okay, whoa, hee-haw, stop right there. The analogy I was drawing there almost certainly does not apply at the level of equating fictional character X to historical character X'. I was suggesting rather that Mr Wolfe's actual experience in such a proxy-war might make him more likely to portray such a war in his fiction, and pointing out some specific features that make me think that the war between the Commonwealth and Ascia is such a portrayal, and is colored by Mr Wolfe's experiences. But to try to draw character-level allegorical correspondences seems to me on about the level that tries to draw such correspondences from The Lord of the Rings to World War II.

Andy Robertson — 01 Jan 1998, 11:28 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>

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but we have to be careful not to take that to mean that the system of the Commonwealth is "good" or the system of Ascia "evil" -- just that the Commonwealth is less evil than Ascia.

Um, I don't agree.

Well, technically, yes. But the Ascian state is the ultimate socialist state, and is meant to be the apex of purely human horror possible.

You are right about the human spirit enduring, of course, but let's not fool ourselves about Wolfe's intent.

hartshorn