

Heavy Hyacinth

The Urth list — 9 messages, 5 voices, 07 Sep 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3448>

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James Jordan — 07 Sep 2002, 15:59

At 06:37 PM 9/6/2002, Roy wrote:

Crush asks:

Is anyone aware of any textual evidence that non-military chems are not light-weight? I know Sand was five-hundred weight, but that was useful for his function.

Yes. Silk was no weakling -- he threw Mamelta over his shoulder and ran with her, bad ankle and all, after Lemur was killed. Yet when Marble/Rose was telling him about Blood's birth, and it finally dawned on Silk that somehow Rose was speaking through Marble, he tested his theory:

"Watching carefully for her reaction, Silk said, 'I would have carried you, Maytera, if I could; but I knew you'd be too heavy for me to lift.'" (LS3, 4; p. 119 pb.)

Also, earlier, following Marble's collapse after being possessed by Echidna, Silk gave her a hand to help her to her feet: "He heaved with all his strength, reawakening the half-healed wounds left by the beak of the white-headed one." (ibid. 117)

Then doesn't that settle the question of whether Hyacinth was a chem? I guess I don't remember anybody's picking her up, but OTOH I don't recall anything about her being too heavy to heave!

Nutria

James Wynn — 09 Sep 2002, 15:16 · follows James Jordan

Nutria (Coypu) quoted:

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Crush whimpers:

I'm afraid it does. Silk picked her up two or three times and when he does, the narrator notes her light weight. I don't have the references but I did (do) note them as clues after the last reference. By that time I knew that a re-reading of the book was necessary to figure out what it was a clue to.

Those of the bio-Hyacinth side should mark this down as special victory. I certainly would if the tables were turned. As I said, I consider her light weight a clue because I don't believe Wolfe repeats a description without it being a clue to something (and why offer a clue that Hy is

human?).

Still the only reason I'm not on my back on the mat from this shot to the melon listening dreamily to the referee's count is Andrew Reeve's recent linkage of Jonas to this discussion. Jonas was notably light-weight. I occurred to me then that Jonas' eventual conversion was just like - or similar - to what (I argue) Hy did.

This makes me believe two things - one of which makes me ambivalently happy and the other not at all happy. (1) I'll have to re-read *The Book of the New Sun* to search for similarities between Hy and Jonas. (2) The nature of Jonas' transformation has never been fully explained so the negative clues of Hy's apparent humanity may never be resolved.

Is it inconceivable that a Hy and Jonas could be based on similar engineering concepts? No, it could be that Wolfe sees the engineering changes necessary to transform a chem to bio involves processes that have the added (potential) benefit of lightening their weight (removal of a hardened outer chasis, etc.) Or, it could be merely a literary connection, the details of which Wolfe has left to the readers.

I reiterate that clues that Hyacinth is human, that she is female, does not resolve clues that she is not. I realize that I am partly to blame for your skepticism for posting a theory that I had not fully developed (just "hey! Look at all the suggestions that Hy is chem!"), but an alternate theory to explain the clues and Silk's explanation to Horn would be useful to me.

James Jordan — 09 Sep 2002, 16:44 · follows James Wynn

At 10:16 AM 9/9/2002, you wrote:

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Setting aside whether all the mooted clues are really clues or might just be misinterpretations: We can always fall back on thematic rather than literal associations. If the name Hyacinth is also a pointer to Apollo, this relationship stands without her having to be a male. (Look, Silk is NOT going to be a homosexual, or engage in homosexual acts. Not in anything by Gene Wolfe.) Similarly, the fact that her name can also be that of a rock can point to the need for human beings to "reach down" and rescue "lesser" humans, in this case chems, without Hy's actually being a chem. We get the same theme in *Short Sun*, where the humans must live in such a way as to redeem the inhumani.

Hy needs rescuing, clearly. She needs a REAL lover, and for Wolfe that's always God and His agents. To add that she's positioned like the chems only adds to the theme. But it does not mean she IS a chem.

All the stuff about the intelligence and personality of the chems and how it might come to pass is interesting, but ultimately irrelevant thematically. Wolfe makes them persons. Period. They are like Cordwainer Smith's "underpeople." Wolfe and Smith write "theological SF." So, to get theological for a moment, if something can "speak," it has some relationship to the Word of God, and thus has some relationship to God and God's agents. True of Oreb and the kitty cat whose name I forget also. One way or another, both writers are playing with this notion. As the Theanthropos has come down from the Increate to redeem humanity, so those redeemed by the Theanthropos have a duty to go down and redeem the sub-human world. Wolfe is not an environmentalist, but he is a conservationist. I.e., he's not a neo-Hindu but a conscientious Christian in his view of the animal world. Human beings should be the shepherds of creation, not the exploiters of it. This is a large concern in some of his shorter writings (especially those about wolves -- duh!). So, thematically we should not be surprised to detect

various expressions of that concern in these larger books.

I say you've advanced the discussion, but thematically, not as regards the "literal" "facts" of the narrative.

FWIW.

Nutria

Andy Robertson — 09 Sep 2002, 14:15 · follows James Jordan

Actually, Smith's robots too. And that is a linkage I had not really considered.

The robots in Smith's stories may be precursors of the chems and of the many "moral" mechanisms in Wolfe's stories (which reach as far back as the guard robots in 5HC)

hartshorn

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

From: "James Jordan" <jbjordan4 at cox.net>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 09 Sep 2002, 16:58 · follows Andy Robertson

Hartshorn wrote ...

The robots in Smith's stories may be precursors of the chems and of the many "moral" mechanisms in Wolfe's stories (which reach as far back as the guard robots in 5HC)

...okay, I'm blanking. The only robots I remember from Smith are the Manshonyaggers, which I somehow can't really think of as "moral." What am I forgetting ...

Andy Robertson — 09 Sep 2002, 14:30 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

The robots in "The Dead Lady Of Clown Town".

Lady Panc Ashash, stuck in a robot body as a travel guide:

and the fighter robots sent to kill D'Joan

<quote>

This is what we all remember: the first authentic picture tape of the entire incident:

The gold and black sergeant, his milky eyes staring at the Lady Panc Ashash

The Lady herself, in the pleasant old robot body, lifting a commanding hand.

Elaine, distraught, half-turning as though she would grab the robot by his right arm. Her head is moving so rapidly that her black hair swings as she turns.

Charley-is-my-darling shouting, "I love, love, love!" at a small hand- some man with mouse-colored hair. The man is gulping and saying nothing.

All this we know.

Then comes the unbelievable, which we now believe, the event for which the stars and worlds were unprepared.

Mutiny.

Robot mutiny.

Disobedience in open daylight.

The words are hard to hear on the tape, but we can still make them out.

The recording device on the police ornithopter had gotten a square fix on the face of the Lady Pane Ashash. Lip-readers can see the words plainly; non-lip-readers can hear the words the third or fourth time the tape is run through the eyebox.

Said the Lady, "Overridden."

Said the sergeant, "No, you're a robot."

"See for yourself. Read my brain. I am a robot. I am also a woman. You cannot disobey people. I am people. I love you. Furthermore, you are people. You think. We love each other. Try. Try to attack."

"I cannot," said the robot sergeant, his milky eyes seeming to spin with excitement. "You love me? You mean I'm alive? I exist?"

"With love, you do," said the Lady Pane Ashash. "Look at her," said the Lady, pointing to Joan, "because she has brought you love."

The robot looked and disobeyed the law. His squad looked with him.

He turned back to the Lady and bowed to her: "Then you know what we must do, if we cannot obey you and cannot disobey the others."

"Do it," she said sadly, "but know what you are doing. You are not really escaping two human commands. You are making a choice. You. That makes you men."

The sergeant turned to his squad of man-sized robots: "You hear that?"

She says we are men. I believe her. Do you believe her?"

"We do," they cried almost unanimously.

This is where the picture-tape ends. but we can imagine how the scene was concluded. Elaine had stopped short, just behind the sergeant-robot. The other robots had come up behind her. Charley-is-my-darling had stopped talking. Joan was in the act of lifting her hands in blessing, her warm brown dog eyes gone wide with pity and understanding. People wrote down the things that we cannot see . . .

</quote>

And many more

hartshorn

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

From: "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>
To: <urth at urth.net>
Sent: Monday, September 09, 2002 5:58 PM
Subject: RE: (urth) Heavy Hyacinth
Hartshorn wrote ...

The robots in Smith's stories may be precursors of the chems and of the many "moral" mechanisms in Wolfe's stories (which reach as far back as the guard robots in 5HC)

...okay, I'm blanking. The only robots I remember from Smith are the Manshonyaggers, which I somehow can't really think of as "moral." What am I forgetting ...

--Blattid

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tom — 09 Sep 2002, 19:02 · follows Andy Robertson

James Jordan writes:

We can always fall back on thematic rather than literal associations. If the name Hyacinth is also a pointer to Apollo, this relationship stands without her having to be a male.

Silk:Jesus::Hyacinth::Mary Magdelene?

I realize this is a bit obvious. Still, it could fit into an overall pattern where Wolfe sends Christ-types on "alternate history" style adventures. Here the variant is "What would have happened had Christ become a rabbi and married Mary Magdelene?"

James Jordan — 09 Sep 2002, 20:52 · follows tom

At 02:02 PM 9/9/2002, you wrote:
James Jordan writes:

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I realize this is a bit obvious. Still, it could fit into an overall pattern where Wolfe sends Christ-types on "alternate history" style adventures. Here the variant is "What would have happened had Christ become a rabbi and married Mary Magdelene?"

Oh, no doubt about it. I don't think it's so much the "what if" as it is that the penitent Magdelene has always been a symbol of the Church. She is

the new Eve who encounters the New Gardener in the New Garden in John's gospel.

Nutria

James Wynn — 09 Sep 2002, 21:18 · follows James Jordan

Nutria declares

We can always fall back on thematic rather than literal associations. If the name Hyacinth is also a pointer to Apollo, this relationship stands without her having to be a male. (Look, Silk is NOT going to be a homosexual, or engage in homosexual acts. Not in anything by Gene Wolfe.)

Crush responds:

Excellent point that Hy does not HAVE to be male to be thematically connected to Hyacinthus. Of course, there are myriads of heterosexual love affairs of Apollo's that Wolfe could have chosen. As for whether Wolfe would

never have a good-guy protagonist engage in a homosexual act - one might axiomatically assert that he wouldn't have such a character wander from woman to woman having casual sex (ala Severian). But I agree that *Silk* is not homosexual. Incidentally, I do "rescue" a priest from closet homosexuality by identifying Incus as female - and since closet homosexuality is a malicious stereo-type of priests, I doubt Wolfe would coddle it.

But the homosexual argument is moot in this case because a chem is not human. Their "sexuality" is not mammalian; it is only modeled on human roles. "Male" or "Female" roles for chems is no more applicable for humans than male and female electrical connections. When Jonas becomes human he choose to be a human male due to his love for Jolenta not due to a sexual preference in a mammalian sense. The machismo aspect of Typhon's culture (exemplified in the requirement of a physically hale male heir) caused all the chem soldiers to needlessly be "male"- and this causes the plight of the chems.

I reiterate that if Hy is a male chem, it does not make her relationship with Silk homosexual. That is not the "taint" in their love-making. Personally, I consider very impressive plotting that IMO Wolfe wove the homosexual undertone of the Apollo/Hyacinthus story into the Silk's love affair without making Silk homosexual (in ANY sense).

Nutria elaborates:

Similarly, the fact that her name can also be that of a rock can point to the need for human beings to "reach down" and rescue "lesser" humans, in this case chems, without Hy's actually being a chem. We get the same theme in Short Sun, where the humans must live in such a way as to redeem the inhumani.

Crush responds:

Excellent point again, that Hy can be "associated" with chems without having to be chem - for example she is associated with Marble in the parallel Crone-Nymph-Maiden triads (Marble-Rose-Mint = Hy-Chenille-Nettle). She could play the crone as does Marble without being a chem like Marble.

Still, (perhaps this comes up in the Short Sun books) I didn't note the theme where the chems need special rescuing. They aren't slave labor in Viron, they have full legal rights as persons. I was actually surprised to see so few of the chem army (or any chems except Marble) following Remora to Blue.

I agree with you that chems are persons. The discussion about taluses with the brown mechanic directly rubs out all significant distinction between the psyches of chems and bios. As for Oreb

and Tick, I'm not sure. Both of them were purchased at different times for a sacrifice - one by Silk and the other by Hy. I don't recall any move to free the animals in the market. There is the loyalty of Oreb in his hostility to Tick (for being a Trivigaunte spy who eventually betrays Silk's meeting with the Ayuntamiento), but quite often the motives seem limited to the basics (food, survival, etc.).

As for Silk's despondency being due to Hy's unfaithfulness, I have been assuming that occurred **after** Silk's discussion with Horn - on the trip back. The Mantis' additional explanation of the being the "lie" being due to help from Kypris - that's a good rationalization but, gosh, I like mine better -- it seems to pull Silk's entire explanation together.

On that point, I never imagined Hy was a chem until I read that conversation on the airship - up until that time, I was merely perplexed by their relationship. Sure I knew her name could be read as ambivalent - just as Chenille's and Villus' can -- but what did it mean?. Like you I had lots of theories about how she was connected thematically to chems - particularly Marble. But after Silk's despondency, the chem theory seemed to answer all my questions (while adding the problem of explaining the flags to the contrary). It answered for me why their relationship, Hy's behavior, and everyone's reaction to the relationship seemed "off". If it never seemed that way to you, then I doubt you'll be compelled by anything I say on this subject - I myself came to this explanation begrudgingly.

Nutria gushes ;-):

I say you've advanced the discussion, but thematically, not as regards the "literal" "facts" of the narrative.

Crush responds:

Well I'll happily take what I can get. Thanks. :-D

--Crush