

Borski and cacogens

The Urth list — 20 messages, 7 voices, 22 May 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4609>

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b sharp — 22 May 2006, 14:43

I read Robert Borski's Solar Labyrinth and was both pleased and disappointed. I was pleased with most of the thoughtful and scholarly analysis. I was disappointed that it took the form of a collection of essays copied mostly verbatim from his other publishings (and postings) without much attempt to form a cohesive, explanatory narrative to hold it all together. This disappointment inspired a search which led to my discovery of this archive. I noticed Borski had posted portions or full versions of his Solar Labyrinth essays in this archive. He received criticisms and suggestions but they seemed largely ignored in his book.

I was pleased that in his section on Father Inire he took a step back and offered the grand view that BotNS is really the story of Inire (and The Cumaen and their children, Famulimus and Barbatus). They toil behind the scenes for 1000 years, moving backward in time to save humanity. In fact he suggests that Moses-like Inire is a more heroic savior than Jesus-like Severian in that Inire dedicates most of his long life to achieving a salvation for others he himself will never see (Robert, I have to ask..are you Jewish? ;-)).

FWIW I'll offer my own suggestions on this topic. Severian observes that cacogens are considered one class or caste on earth but that they probably have their own races and divisions. I see two distinct types among those Severian meets:

1. includes Father Inire and the Cumaen (perhaps Hethor). They appear as small, old, twisted people, usually hooded. They are associated with animals and probably have the ability to shapeshift (who does this evoke from 5th Head?). They have the ability to instantaneously transcend distance but not time, with mirrors, perhaps other devices and clairvoyance. (I suspect the Cumaen needed Severian, in the seance, to transcend time). They live on Urth and provide its denizens with direct services such as a Botanical Garden, a Secret House Absolute and an Oracle.

2. includes Famulimus and Barbatus. They appear as very tall, young and unnaturally beautiful. They are associated with angels (Tzadkiel). They show no shapeshifting ability and wear masks around humans. They have the ability to travel in time but need spaceships to traverse distance. They provide Baldanders with knowledge and machinery which can't be duplicated on Urth. They live in space ships and stay separate from humanity.

(I'm not sure if Juturna fits best as a combination of these two or as part of a distinct race)

There are some suggestions these two groups do work together. In his letter to the new Autarch, Inire says he hopes his "cousins" will decide to provide them more weaponry for the Ascian war and that they will finally recognize the Commonwealth as the best and truest representation of Urth.

Borski thinks Ossipago is Father Inire in disguise, inside a semi-robotic suit. Perhaps this is true. Just before he meets F, B and O, Severian sees a spaceship above Baldanders' castle with blobs

of orange light going up and down. We later learn the orange light teleports people up and down from the ship. Wolfe very pointedly has Severian see two blobs of orange light appear just before he enters the castle. Two, not three.

Here is a question I've not seen posed before: Severian sees Jonas uses Father Inire's mirrors to travel to the stars and presumably a spaceship (The Spaceship?). The old autarch, Appian, also shows Severian the way to reach Tzadkiel and New Sun testing is through mirrors (in a giant book, "go if you dare"). So why does Severian use spaceships instead of mirrors to reach his destination in Urth of the New Sun?

The mirrors are highly associated with bestial creatures while the spaceships seem the products of more angelic creatures. Perhaps this choice helped Severian pass his test while Appian, using mirrors, failed.

-bsharp

Macronaut — 22 May 2006, 17:06 · in reply to b sharp

I see two

distinct types among those
Severian meets:

1. includes Father Inire and the Cumean (perhaps Hethor). They appear as small, old, twisted people, usually hooded. They are associated with animals and probably have the ability to shapeshift (who does this evoke from 5th Head?). They have the ability to instantaneously transcend distance but not time, with mirrors, perhaps other devices and clairvoyance. (I suspect the Cumean needed Severian, in the seance, to transcend time). They live on Urth and provide its denizens with direct services such as a Botanical Garden, a Secret House Absolute and an Oracle.

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What makes us think Father Inire and the Cumean have the ability to shapeshift? It's not clear to me that Father Inire and the Cumean <cannot> travel time, or simply choose not to. On the contrary, there's some info to suggest they do know how to travel time, even

if they don't do it themselves -- how else could FI construct the Botanical Gardens, with its time-twisting abilities? If they cannot, that also may have something to do with the availability of technology -- both Inire and the Cumean seem to operate with less access to so-called Stellar technology than F,B, and O.

And what makes us think that FI and the C aren't wearing masks? I would think they are, and I seem to recall at some point (1) Sev mentions that fact about FI, and (2) reports seeing the image of some kind of alien, multi-eyed serpent superimposed over the Cumean's outward guise as old woman.

Also, I think its accurate to say that F,B and O seem to use ships for both distance and time -- unless you are referring to them living backwards, which is no more a form of time travel than our living forwards.

And I don't think it's correct to say that the cacogens stay separate from humanity -- on the contrary they seem to be regular visitors at the House Absolute -- so much so that they need scary masks to keep humanity from getting to familiar or dependent on them.

OTOH, one additional difference btw the two groups you identify is their apparent longevity -- hasn't Father Inire served multiple Autarchs, such that his years are beyond those normal for cacogens? And hasn't the Cumean served the witches for a similarly long period?

Another apparent difference is that FI and the C seem to be living forwards -- they show none of the signs F, B and O do of living in reverse. On this point, it's hard to imagine how Inire could supervise construction of the gardens and the secret House if every day he forgot what he did the day before.

As for why Sev takes the ship, I think it has less to do with the symbolism of this being an angelic form of transport and much more to do with the fact that his passage on the ship gives him the opportunity to prove to Tzadkiel that Urth should be redeemed. Tzadkiel uses the voyage to familiarize herself with Sev and his morals by appearing to him on the ship in various forms (apport, Zak the crewman, the false epitome of Urth, etc.).

Lastly, your post reminds me of a couple of long-standing questions:

1) FI is performing clear services for humanity and has chosen a seemingly appropriate position to do so at the center of the Commonwealth's administration. What is the Cumean doing for humanity? How does her interaction with the obscure Witches' guild or her equally obscure presence in a disused part of the Botanical Gardens help redeem humanity? Or is she around for some entirely different reason?

2) Wolfe at one point suggests that the Commonwealth trades in human slaves in exchange for the Stellar-level technology they receive. What do the cacogens do with those humans they take?

Thanks for your patience if you have read to the end of this.

Macronaut

b sharp — 22 May 2006, 18:50 · follows Macronaut

Thanks for your patience if you have read to the end of this.

Macronaut

Macronaut you DO pose a large number of questions which I appreciate! I did have the patience to read through them all, though I'm not sure anyone else will want to ;-). I think I can answer most of them, though some I may have to defer to a new, separate post. I think you answer some yourself though.

What makes us think Father Inire and the Cumean have the ability to shapeshift? And what makes >us think that FI and the C aren't wearing masks?

As you note, the Cumaeon, when seen in 4 dimensions by Severian, really has the form of a headless (or endlessly long) snake with many faces on her back. I don't think any mask would make THAT look like an old woman. Regarding Father Inire, Borski identifies him as making many secret appearances. In the two most obvious (servitor guides Severian to Green Room; guide with monkeyhead pole in the jungle) he is wearing a hood. I think he makes some other appearances that Borski misses in which his face (shapeshifted) is showing. As The Cumaeon is snake-like, so I think Inire is monkey-like. Note in the Jungle room of the Botanical Garden both a snake and a monkey are encountered. But more on that in later posts.

On the Cumaeon and Inire focused more on traversing distance than time:

This was an off the cuff thought which may not be defensible. But we are told explicitly that F, B and O travel in time we don't know this to be true of Inire and The Cumaeon. But they seem to have ways to suddenly appear here and there and tools to allow others to do so, also.

And I don't think it's correct to say that the cacogens stay separate from humanity -- on the contrary they seem to be regular visitors at the House Absolute>

F, B and O make a rare appearance at the House Absolute to see a very special performance by their favorite person, in his earlier years. Otherwise they keep completely separate from humanity. In Baldanders' castle, they make it clear the Lake people cannot enter until they

leave. They show similar avoidance of humans on Ship Tzadkiel and in the ancient Stone Town of Apu Punchau.

On their lifespans: It is Baldanders who says F, B and O have a 20 year lifespan (like dogs, lol). Later Severian comments on how much longer Father Inire has lived than the lifespan of his shortlived species. How might he be prolonging his life? Consider the Cumaean's namesake in Greek/Roman mythology. She was: (a sybil, connection to Long Sun surely intended)

the prophetic old women of Greek mythology; she guided Aeneas through Hades in the Aeneid. >She had been granted immortality by Apollo, but because she forgot to ask for perpetual youth, >she shrank into withered old age and her authority declined.>http://members.chello.nl/~a.vanarum8/EliotProject/Waste_notes/Sibyl.htm

On F, B and O's time sense: I think it has previously been successfully argued that they only travel backward in time. They can't perceive time backward or they couldn't even have a conversation. To them the previous sentence would appear as: .noitaservnoc a evah neve t'ndluoc yeht ro drawkcab emit eviecrep t'nac yehT. But they do travel always backward in time while there is no evidence I know of that Inire and The Cumaean do.

Regarding Severian's choice of pathway to the stars:

As for why Sev takes the ship, I think it has less to do with the symbolism of this being an angelic form of transport and much more to do with the fact that his passage on the ship gives him the opportunity to prove to Tzadkiel that Urth should be redeemed. Tzadkiel uses the voyage to familiarize herself with Sev and his morals by appearing to him on the ship in various forms (apport, Zak the crewman, the false epitome of Urth, etc.).>

Exactly! If Severian had taken the mirrors he would have missed all that. Imagine Appian taking the mirrors, sitting down at a celestial table to do a few multiple choice and T/F questions. In Foila's story she asks which path to take, the shortest or the best? Choose the angel's path over the beasties, because they are closer to God.

Next question is a good one-

What is the Cumean doing for humanity?

I think I know but would like to answer that in another (but soon forthcoming) post.

Lastly:

Wolfe at one point suggests that the Commonwealth trades in human slaves in exchange for the Stellar-level technology they receive. What do the cacogens do with those humans they take?>

I have not seen or noted this suggestion. Now Typhon makes it clear he would do interstellar trade in slaves but I assume that's not what you mean. Could you point me to the reference? It's possible I have an answer....

Okay, I think that addresses everything. How did I do????

-bsharp

b sharp — 22 May 2006, 19:09 · follows b sharp

p.s. Regarding regular visits of F, B and O to the House Absolute, if you mean to Severian, after he is autarch then I think they must be private audience of one.

Mark Millman — 22 May 2006, 19:25 · in reply to b sharp

Dear b sharp:

On Mon, 22 May 2006, b sharp wrote:
Consider the Cumaean's namesake
in Greek/Roman mythology. She
was: (a sybil, connection to
Long Sun surely intended)

Surely not. Long Sun wasn't published until
a decade after New Sun, as originally planned
(i.e., without _Urth_), was complete. It may
be the case that the use of "sibyl" in Long
Sun is a deliberate reference to the Cumaean,
but it seems very unlikely that Wolfe was sow-
ing seeds for Long Sun when he wrote the
Cumaean.

Mark Millman

maru dubshinki — 23 May 2006, 00:13 · in reply to b sharp

On 5/22/06, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

As you note, the Cumaean, when seen in 4 dimensions by Severian, really has
the form of a headless (or endlessly long) snake with many faces on her
back. I don't think any mask would make THAT look like an old woman.
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appearances. In the two most obvious (servitor guides Severian to Green
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(shapeshifted) is showing. As The Cumaean is snake-like, so I think Inire
is monkey-like. Note in the Jungle room of the Botanical Garden both a
snake and a monkey are encountered. But more on that in later posts.

.....

Okay, I think that addresses everything. How did I do????

-bsharp

So you think the Cumaean was a single really weird hierodule? Funny- I'd always took it as a
message that this was a single entity who inhabited multiple humans over time (the many faces
and continuous snake), possibly in an Autarch-way of eating the brain. One wonders what
Autarch Sev would look like....

~maru

b sharp — 23 May 2006, 00:18 · follows maru dubshinki

Mark Millman writes:

It may be the case that the use of "sibyl" in Long Sun is a deliberate
reference to the Cumaean,

but it seems very unlikely that Wolfe was sowing seeds for Long Sun when he wrote the >Cumaean.

I think some Wolfe worshipers have the idea that he had Wizard Knight mentally complete before he wrote Island of Doctor Death.

But when I mention the connection of the sibyls (sorry@ prev. spelling) in Long Sun to BotNS I meant the backward, not forward connection. That is much easier to defend and much less speculative since the previous work can be demonstrated to be in existence during the writing of the later work.

For this same reason I am much more prone to noting the connections of BotNS to 5th Head of Cerberus than later works.

-bsharp

Mark Millman — 23 May 2006, 04:39 · in reply to b sharp

Dear b sharp,

Please forgive my misunderstanding your point. I appreciate this clarification, and your patience with my misapprehension.

Mark Millman

On Mon, 22 May 2006, b sharp wrote:
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-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 23 May 2006, 08:34 · follows Mark Millman

Macronaut wrote:

Another apparent difference is that FI and the C seem to be living forwards -- they show none of the signs F, B and O do of living in reverse. On this point, it's hard to imagine how Inire could supervise construction of the gardens and the secret House if every day he forgot what he did the day before.

b sharp wrote:

On F, B and O's time sense: I think it has previously been successfully argued that they only travel backward in time. They can't perceive time backward or they couldn't even have a conversation. To them the previous sentence would appear as: .noitaservnoc a evah neve t'ndluoc yeht ro drawkcab emit eviecrep t'nac yehT.

Regardless of how they personally cope with their temporal backwardness when interacting with normal people, the fact remains, as I pointed out about a week ago in the "Baldanders" thread, from the viewpoint of forward-living entities, they know less and less as time goes on. Just revisit their first meeting with Severian on the Ship to see it.

One of Ossipago's primary baby-sitting functions may have been to serve as a data source/timekeeper for his charges, allowing them to interact with those who experienced time conventionally. As a machine with sensors and a data-storage and retrieval system, he must have experienced the flow of time in a clockwise fashion.

-Roy

b sharp — 23 May 2006, 11:41 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy says:

Regardless of how they personally cope with their temporal backwardness when interacting with normal people, the fact remains, as I pointed out about a week ago in the "Baldanders" thread, from the viewpoint of forward-living entities, they know less and less as time goes on. Just revisit their first meeting with Severian on the Ship to see it.>

Yes, F, B and O know less and less as OUR time passes. We know less and less as their time passes. They know the most in Apu Punchau's time.

Roy says:

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data-storage and retrieval system, he must have experienced the flow of time in a clockwise fashion.

This contradicts the "Ossipago is Inire" theory, which is fine with me. But any thoughts on why Severian, before he enters Baldanders' castle, sees one orange blob teleport up to the spaceship, then only two ready to teleport down, just before he meets F, B and O for the (his) first time?

(the boring answer to the photo question is that it is merely the product of a image web search using the key words "embarrassed face") I think there is only one picture of me posted online, me playing saxophone.)

-bsharp

b sharp — 23 May 2006, 12:15 · follows b sharp

maru writes:

So you think the Cumaeen was a single really weird hierodule? Funny- I'd always took it as a message that this was a single entity who inhabited multiple humans over time (the many faces and continuous snake), possibly in an Autarch-way of eating the brain. One wonders what Autarch Sev would look like....

I believe Wolfe specifically identifies Inire and The Cumaeen as cacogens in one of his appendices, but I like your idea! It fits well with my upcoming post on the purpose of The Cumaeen and witches.

In Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse Five, the Tralfamadorians can see in four dimensions, that is all of time simultaneously. So to them, a human being looks like a long caterpillar with a baby's legs at the back and an old person's head at the front. Something similar for The Cumaeen?

If we take a mythological point of view (as Wolfe seems happy to, at least in part) we could say in simple terms that there are three basic sorts of beings:

Beast Man God(s).

Magical creatures are usually found in the spaces between. In modern times and modern mythology (SF, Fantasy?) we can add Machine to that Trinity, though there are rare examples of them in ancient myths (the Greek Talos, for example, perhaps the Golem is another).

So I wouldn't call The Cumaeen (or Inire) Hierodules because they have bestial associations (and may be capable of rather bestial behavior.). They are ugly and can scare small children (Domnina) when they smile. The Hierodules or "holy slaves" seem to inhabit the space between human and angel (or arch-angel as Tzadkiel's name suggests). They are inhumanly beautiful and are so pure we aren't even supposed to discuss slime around them.

-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 23 May 2006, 17:34 · follows b sharp

b sharp wrote:

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Cacogen is a derogatory general term used on Urth to indicate all non-human aliens. Not all cacogens belong to the same species. Not all "holy slaves" need belong to the same species. Inire and the Cumaeen are in fact Hierodules.

"...the Cumaeen, she was a Hierodule, like you. Father Inire told me."
Famulimus and Barbatus nodded." (URTH, 357)

-Roy

b sharp — 23 May 2006, 22:45 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy says:

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"...the Cumaeen, she was a Hierodule, like you. Father Inire told me."
Famulimus and Barbatus nodded." (URTH, 357)

Good catch Roy and good analysis.

It is the in the appendix of Claw where Wolfe tells us they are both cacogens. But since I'm in a priggish mood I'll increase the precision and observe that text tells us that The Cumaeen is a hierodule but not Inire. So she, at least, is both cacogen and hierodule.

-bsharp

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 24 May 2006, 00:03 · in reply to b sharp

On 5/23/06, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
"...the Cumaeen, she was a Hierodule, like you. Father Inire told me."
> Famulimus and Barbatus nodded." (URTH, 357)

that text tells us that The Cumaeen is a hierodule but not Inire. So she, at least, is both cacogen and hierodule.

"Both cacogen and hierodule" is like saying "both vertebrate and mammalian." The latter implies the former.

You are right, of course, that the text leaves the hierosity of Father Inire rather ambiguous. The question is -- are there any human-scale cacogens on Urth who are not Hierish? If so, who are they and how do we know?

--Dan'I

suddenly I feel like singing "When Hierish Eyes are Smiling"

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.
-- St Teresa of Avila
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

b sharp — 24 May 2006, 00:27 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

LOL@ Hierish eyes smiling. For shadow children it is, "hey there, you with the stars in your eyes".

anyway Dan'l says:

The question is -- are there
any human-scale cacogens on Urth who are _not_ Hierish?
If so, who are they and how do we know?

I think Robert Borski would say we can know them (cacogens) when they have mythological names and/or hide their eyes. Maybe also when we suspect they are shape shifters or to use the other Wolfe word for that: "therians". No I don't think all the therians are mega.

-bsharp

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 24 May 2006, 00:44 · in reply to b sharp

Heh. The question was bait and I got switched! I guess I was trying to see if, for example, anyone would suggest the alzabo as a cacogen: certainly, a case can be made.

What human-scale "therians" can you point to?

--Dan'l

...and the Claw of the Conciliator turned out to be a
thorn from "My Wild Hierish Rose."

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.
-- St Teresa of Avila
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

Jeff Wilson — 24 May 2006, 03:38 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Heh. The question was bait and I got switched! I guess I was
trying to see if, for example, anyone would suggest the
alzabo as a cacogen: certainly, a case can be made.

What human-scale "therians" can you point to?

The various human-animal hybrids serving the autarch, from the mastiff men in the coach full of gold, to the anpiels, and perhaps even the ape-men in the mine at Saltus.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson@io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 24 May 2006, 06:36 · follows Jeff Wilson

At the beginning of this thread, b sharp wrote:
Borski thinks Ossipago is Father Inire in disguise, inside a semi-robotic
suit. Perhaps this is true. Just before he meets F, B and O, Severian
sees
a spaceship above Baldanders' castle with blobs of orange light going up
and
down. We later learn the orange light teleports people up and down from the
ship. Wolfe very pointedly has Severian see two blobs of orange light
appear just before he enters the castle. Two, not three.

And in a follow-up:

This contradicts the "Ossipago is Inire" theory, which is fine with me.

But

any thoughts on why Severian, before he enters Baldanders' castle, sees one orange blob teleport up to the spaceship, then only two ready to teleport down, just before he meets F, B and O for the (his) first time?

I don't see the point of this, but this is the text in question:

"The misty light of the moon, the younger sister's kiss upon the face of her dying elder, shone on the upper surface of that huge disk. Beneath it, in its thick shadow, gleamed sparks of orange light. They moved, gliding up or down, though their movement was so slow that I had watched them for some time before I was conscious of it. Eventually, one rose until it appeared to be immediately under the disk and vanished, and just before we came to shore, two more appeared in the same spot." (SWORD, chapter XXXII)

The "sparks of orange light", seen from a distance, were the crewmen, the "mermen" mentioned in the quote someone gave the other day (chapter XXXV, first paragraph), moving around on the hull. There were obviously more than three of them. What difference does it make if one went up and two came down? All three Hierodules were inside the castle when Severian entered. One of the "mermen" made an appearance at a castle window while they were talking. One showed himself, "wreathed in orange light", on the hull just before B, F and O went back to the ship. They ascended by using a slender line that was "glowing orange". The "mermen" didn't use the orange line to get about on the hull, but they probably used it to reach the castle, 35 feet below the ship. I doubt if Ossipago, even without his human costume, could have crawled around on the hull.

At any rate, if B, F and O glowed orange while going up to the ship, Severian failed to note it. I don't see any reason to suppose a particular connection of the three "sparks of orange light" in question to B, F and O -- if that is what you are trying to do.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 24 May 2006, 06:40 · follows Roy C. Lackey

b sharp quoted Macronaut and wrote:
Wolfe at one point suggests that the Commonwealth trades in human slaves in exchange for the Stellar-level technology they receive. What do the cacogens do with those humans they take?>

I have not seen or noted this suggestion. Now Typhon makes it clear he would do interstellar trade in slaves but I assume that's not what you mean. Could you point me to the reference? It's possible I have an answer....

It's in the Appendix to CITADEL.

-Roy

Macronaut — 24 May 2006, 14:47 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I wrote:
Wolfe at one point suggests that the Commonwealth trades in human slaves in exchange for the Stellar-level technology they receive. What do the
the
cacogens do with those humans they take?>

I have two ideas about this (if I may propose an answer to my own question). My preferred theory is that no harm is done to them -- they are welcomed into Heirodule society and raised in that culture and technology, and possibly even interbreed. Master Ash provides evidence that this happens -- reading Sev's description of him it becomes clear that he has traits in common both of humans and of heirodules, and he describes their saving humanity (at least some of it) from the encroaching ice of his future. The other reason this fits for me is Christian symbolism: the most wretchedly treated on earth are the ones admitted to the peaceful technological paradise of the heirodules. The heirodule practice of buying slaves also serves as a barometer for man's moral development in the Commonwealth: if people are still willing to sell slaves, then mankind is not yet ready for redemption. The real interesting piece of evidence I would love to find is something indicating that Sev discontinued this practice during his uthly reign.

Anyway, the more mundane explanation is that they are used as crew on Tzadkiel's ship.

Macronaut