

Urth before Urth

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 19 Jul 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4663>

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b sharp — 19 Jul 2006, 19:00

Dan'I, thanks for the feedback. It is always appreciated, especially when given with insight. I think we are in agreement on these issues except at two points.

Dan'I suggests:

the universal singularity at the moment between cycles is the only place where you can actually >break out of BriaH and into Yesod

While I think Inire's mirrors and the Jungle Hut are other options. The mirrors are clearly a transport method as well as viewing instrument. And the Jungle Hut might allow physical transportation, especially if Isangoma is Inire.

Dan'I makes it clear he agree that Earth is in Urth's future..but...not in Yesod, still in BriaH.

I just found a James Jordan/Gene Wolfe interview quote which supports Earth being in Urth's future: (<http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/gwjbj3.html#urth2>)

JJ: This universe that you sought in BriaH are part of it. Is that our universe? Or is that a universe >that resurrected saints have set up in the world to come as part of the cities that they made?

GW: No. I thought of it as a long past universe. Something that we are repeating rather than >something that we are

Gene Wolfe also says, regarding his thinking on Urth cycles:

Yes, I began with the idea of what is going to happen to us if we just keep going the way we are >going and continue to live on the continent of Earth without ever really going into the sea or >going into space and we just wait for the money to run out. The do nothing future and thinking >about what that would be. And then I got into the idea of universal cycles. And decided that I >would show that this might be a past cycle. Some physicists at least think that the Big Bang is >eventually going to be followed by a Big GnaB in which the whole universe coalesces again which >will be followed by another Big Bang which is sort of like a succession of universe as piston impulses >in an internal combustion engine.

If Earth is just a part of a future BriaH, separate from Yesod, then I think something is missing, which is progress. I sense that spiritual progress is something Wolfe considers important (more interview quotes support this). What good is it for BriaH or other universe residents to go through all their struggles and progress only to collapse and disappear, only to have the same universe reappear with the same deck of cards shuffled a bit? The Hieros made it from BriaH to Yesod, becoming higher beings, later returning to BriaH to help out (purify? more on the contamination later) their cognate race and creators.

I like Mantis' idea of a hierarchy of 3 universes we are able to perceive in BotNS, a hellish Abaddon, Severian's BriaH and a heavenly Yesod and see it supported in the text. If Inire's mirrors access Yesod, then we can guess what universe Hethor's mirrors access...

On Thu, 22 Apr 1999 Moonmilk Archives, Nick Gevers criticized Mantis' universal scheme in this post: <http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0026/0003.shtml> by invoking strict Kabbalistic interpretations.

I appreciate Gevers' scholarship but...in the same interview as above, Gene Wolfe says this (with a couple snips):

I don't want to try to answer questions on the cabala. I never knew a great deal about it and I >have forgotten most of what I knew. I have the great disadvantage of not believing in it and so I >can't get so caught up in it as cabalist really do. To me it was someplace that I could steal ideas >and names from.

I noticed this quote a while back and have, therefore, avoided looking too deeply into Kabbalah concepts to explain BotNS and am a bit skeptical regarding those who do. There is another, non-cosmological, Kabbalistic theme Wolfe borrows which I haven't seen mentioned by any critical review, that being the Lilith myth. I think I hinted at that a month or two ago but I'm not sure. I'll try to discuss it if I can gel my ideas and if there is any interest.

-bsharp

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 Jul 2006, 21:24 · in reply to b sharp

B,

Dan'l suggests:

the universal singularity at the moment between cycles is the only place where you can actually >break out of Briah and into Yesod

I meant to write "...where you can easily break out...", so we are more in agreement than you thought! Clearly there is a reason why Zak's Ship goes all that way rather than using big mirrors (they certainly wouldn't have to be as big as the sunsails!): I suggest that it's because it's much easier, esp. for a vehicle which needs mobility -- the setup of the mirrors seems to require excruciatingly exact angles, etc., which would be hard to do on anything independently mobile.

I'm not at all sure what's up with the Jungle Hut, or the Gardens in general.

If Earth is just a part of a future Briah, separate from Yesod, then I think something is missing, which is progress.

Indeed it is! The Hieros are trapped in an unending cycle of Big Bang/Grand Ghab where they and the human race alternate creating and uplifting each other, but no real progress is possible. In Wolfe's (that is to say, Christian) terms, real progress is possibly only through divine intervention: which happens on an individual level for specific people, and happens on a universal level in the Earth cycle of Briah, with the birth and sacrifice of the "Theoanthropos," i.e., Christ. The cycles are so similar from one to the next that one of the "paintings" in the Gallery is a near-exact copy of the famous photograph of Armstrong saluting the flag on the Moon; which also implies that the Incarnation doesn't change outward history notably. Just as there have been previous Severians, there have been previous Jesuses; the Jesus of the Urth cycle of Briah may well be "the man possessed and enlightened by the Outsider" that Silk sees during his enlightenment. (Clearly, the Bible, more or less as we know it, was written in that cycle, since it's quoted repeatedly in the Sun books.)

What good is it for Briah or other universe residents to go through all their struggles and progress only to collapse and disappear, only to have the same universe reappear with the

same deck of cards shuffled a bit?

... or even not at all?

One could as easily ask of Christianity, "What was the point of all the rises and falls, the triumphs and sufferings, of the nation of Israel?" From the Christian standpoint, it appears to have been "to prove that fallen humanity is not perfectable without the direct intervention of the Increate, that even a perfect Law can not save humanity, only grace." Could a similar demonstration be going on here on a grand scale, one appropriate to Hiero-beings whose schemes cross the boundaries from one cycle of Briah to the next?

The Hieros made it from Briah to Yesod, becoming higher beings, later returning to Briah to help out (purify? more on the contamination later) their cognate race and creators.

I suggest that the Hieros are not perfected beings any more than humans are. "Higher," yes, in the same sense that Israel under the Law was "higher" than (say) Egypt or Babylon -- but still infinitely far from the Increate.

I like Mantis' idea of a hierarchy of 3 universes we are able to perceive in BotNS, a hellish Abaddon, Severian's Briah and a heavenly Yesod and see it supported in the text.

As do I. And there may, of course, be others.

I don't want to try to answer questions on the cabala. I never knew a great deal about it and I have forgotten most of what I knew. ...To me it was someplace that I could steal ideas and names from.

How shall I put this... Wolfe is sometimes a bit, ahhh, disingenuous about such things. Note please that he "stole" not only names but ideas; ergo, he had at least some knowledge of the meaning of the names he "stole."

I noticed this quote a while back and have, therefore, avoided looking too deeply into Kabbalah concepts to explain BotNS

Reasonable. I am certainly not suggesting that we try to work up the numerology of each character's name (which would begin by transliterating the names into Hebrew characters, *natürlich*); rather, I am suggesting that Wolfe's Rule of Names applies. A thing's name says what it is. I don't for a moment think Wolfe didn't know what Briah and Yesod meant when he chose to use them; a too-literal reading of the quote in question would imply that Wolfe was a far more slapdash and erratic writer than I am for a moment willing to believe, for it's asking me to believe that, in a book where he carefully considered the historical and mythological significance of every other person, place, and thing, he just tossed in a couple of names that sounded good ... for universes.

Pull the other one, Gene: it's got bells on.

There is another, non-cosmological, Kabbalistic theme Wolfe borrows which I haven't seen mentioned by any critical review, that being the Lilith myth. I think I hinted at that a month or two ago but I'm not sure. I'll try to discuss it if I can gel my ideas and if there is any interest.

Well, I'll be looking forward to it. I've always had a vague idea that the lamia were hiding in there somewhere near the alzado; Lilith is a similar being.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.

However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson

Adam Thornton — 20 Jul 2006, 04:10 · in reply to b sharp

On Jul 19, 2006, at 12:00 PM, b sharp wrote:

I like Mantis' idea of a hierarchy of 3 universes we are able to perceive in

BotNS, a hellish Abaddon, Severian's Briah and a heavenly Yesod and see it

supported in the text. If Inire's mirrors access Yesod, then we can guess

what universe Hethor's mirrors access...

Why stop at 3? We get 7 in WK....

Adam