

An Evil Guest - Big Questions, Major SPOILERS

The Urth list — 16 messages, 9 voices, 21 Sep 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5154>

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Matthew Keeley — 21 Sep 2008, 21:59

I just finished An Evil Guest, and I have quite a few questions (as is par for the course with Wolfe). Really liked the book though - I liked Pirate Freedom, but I thought this was much superior. And I think it provided more room for speculation too. My major questions follow below the spoiler space...

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The Wolders - Are those the bat creatures? How are the laws of physics different on Woldercan? Does this relate to hopper technology? And alchemy too? Time travel? What exactly IS Gideon Chase? Where did RC (presumably his father Robert) get that watch? The Silent Woman? The living mountain? Arthur Thomas Franklin? Three names... like Howard Philips Lovecraft? What sort of incantatory purpose did Dating the Volcano God serve? Did Cassie really DO anything - she sometimes seems more spectator than actor How does William Reis know the name "Ry'leh?" Did the Navy win?

Other comments:

Forty-seven states? Also, the bit about "post-parturition abortion" was the most explicitly political I've seen Wolfe get in a long time. What, by the way, is a "defective" child? Perhaps one whose genetic engineering didn't work out? There's a reference to anticloning laws in the last chapter, so presumably the future US can perform some genetic engineering.

Looking forward to hearing your thoughts on the book,

-Matt

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Other comments:

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Looking forward to hearing your thoughts on the book,

-Matt

Russell Wodell — 21 Sep 2008, 22:34 · in reply to John Watkins

Other questions & therefore spoilers...

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Like *Free Live Free* and *There Are Doors*, *An Evil Guest* seems to be taking place in the future and in the 1940s simultaneously. I mean, seriously, a big off-Broadway musical about a missionary's daughters in the South Seas? Could even "glamour" make that possible in today's or tomorrow's theatre? Wouldn't a vanity film or 3-d "vid" be more probable?

Hasn't Wolfe used the Shark God and the Squid God before in a fairly recent short story?

We're told pretty explicitly that the "gods" of former civilizations are in reality aliens who live unobserved on Earth. Does this mean that the "gods" Latro encounters in the *Soldier* novels are also aliens? Are we in a * Stargate* situation?

I appeal to better minds than mine...

Matthew Keeley — 21 Sep 2008, 22:40 · in reply to John Watkins

On Sun, Sep 21, 2008 at 6:23 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:
Spoilers--I also finished this morning.

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I can't answer all of that, but "Arthur Thomas Franklin" is a government agency--presumably slang for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms--the ATF (now officially Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, but still ATF).

A "defective" child is probably just a child born with a genetic defect or other inborn condition. I took it as a reference to the current practice of aborting Down Syndrome fetuses rather than a hint as to an elaborate regime of genetic engineering.

Re: ATF: I should have remembered about the ATF.

Re: defective: I considered that, but "defective" has the ring of manufacture about it; as in "I returned the defective TV to the store." And these aren't kids being aborted from the womb: this is "post-parturition" (i.e. after-birth) abortion. Are we supposed to assume that there are people who would a) give birth to a child with Down Syndrome and then b) abort it after living with said child for a few years. I don't think anyone good enough to do a) would be cold-hearted enough to do b).

-Matt

Gwern Branwen — 21 Sep 2008, 22:56 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On 2008.09.21 18:40:08 -0400, Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com> scribbled 3.4K characters:

Re: ATF: I should have remembered about the ATF.

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-Matt

I've not enjoyed EG yet, but the moment someone mentioned 'defective', I immediately thought of eugenics. Particularly in post-birth situations, I think that's the right connection to draw (Nazis and 1930s and all).

gvern

17 Bugs SS8 Undercover Tie-fighter AST Goodwin SABC CFC IWIS

John Watkins — 21 Sep 2008, 23:08 · in reply to Gvern Branwen

The eugenics connection is, I think correct. As for no one being "heartless" enough to kill a "defective" child post delivery, I direct you to noted ethicist Peter Singer. Money quote:

""I do not think it is always wrong to kill an innocent human being," Professor Singer told the rapt audience in Harold Helm Auditorium. "Simply killing an infant is never equivalent to killing a person.""

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C04E2D91530F930A25753C1A96F958260&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

If Wolfe is pro-life, as many conservative Catholics are, he'd be quite likely to be aware of Singer's stance on the moral significance of the life of a disabled child.

On Sun, Sep 21, 2008 at 6:56 PM, Gvern Branwen <gvern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

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Matthew Keeley — 22 Sep 2008, 00:05 · in reply to John Watkins

On Sun, Sep 21, 2008 at 7:08 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:
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"heartless" enough to kill a "defective" child post delivery, I direct
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""I do not think it is always wrong to kill an innocent human
being," Professor Singer told the rapt audience in Harold Helm
Auditorium. "Simply killing an infant is never equivalent to killing
a person.""

I know of Singer and his ideas - my point was that most people who would give birth to a child with a genetic defect (instead of aborting it) would be incapable of killing after it was born, after it was more (as it were) than an image on a sonogram. Would Wolfe's hypothetical "civil rights" groups really be looking for permission to kill retarded children five years after birth? How many people would actually take up on that? But if your designer baby didn't come out to spec, maybe you'd eventually decide it wasn't worth it... I think Wolfe's future is pretty dark, once you turn off the Broadway lights.

-Matt

Andy Robertson — 22 Sep 2008, 07:39 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Matthew Keeley writes:

Also, the bit about "post-parturition abortion" was the
most explicitly political I've seen Wolfe get in a long time.

Any cross reference to Dick's very powerful anti-abortion story, "The Pre-Persons," which involved just such a trope???

<http://www.thenightland.co.uk>

01273-488272 / 0777-214-9545

Pedro Pereira — 22 Sep 2008, 13:53 · in reply to Russell Wodell

I doubt Latro's Gods have anything to do with aliens. It's a different book with different concepts and ideas. Wolfe actually believes that Pagan Gods were/are real, some kind of minor gods that exist alongside the "real and only God" and that are not deserving of being worshiped. He once said that modern science has shown that such is possible. I don't know where he got that idea from though...

Pedro

Date: Sun, 21 Sep 2008 15:34:35 -0700
From: wrustle at gmail.com
To: urth at lists.urth.net
Subject: Re: (urth) An Evil Guest - Big Questions, Major SPOILERS

Other questions & therefore spoilers...

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brunians at brunians.org — 22 Sep 2008, 19:02 · in reply to Pedro Pereira

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I believe that he is making a little joke: some people call it 'scientism', when you make a religion out of science.

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Gwern Branwen — 22 Sep 2008, 23:45 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On 2008.09.21 20:05:52 -0400, Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com> scribbled 3.2K characters:

On Sun, Sep 21, 2008 at 7:08 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com> wrote:

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-Matt

I wouldn't be so sanguine about people not killing infants and youngsters. There are many examples of people killing their kids, in a systematic fashion. Wolfe would no doubt be acquainted with the famous Spartan traditions of exposure; I recall similar Russian traditions. You can't read Victorian accounts of China without there being clucking over how those Chinese like to abandon babies to die, to say nothing of how various massacres, wars, purges etc. never respected young humans (and sometimes targeted them specifically; I think I remember Rwandan rhetoric about not letting the children of cockroaches grow up to be cockroaches).

Some of these are economically motivated but many are not. And then we begin to consider all the sterilizations and euthanasias in America and Nazi Germany.

Now, presumably someone who is pro-life before birth will not become pro-choice after birth (and in an extreme Singeresque way); but on the other hand, I've seen more than one fictional work in which a burdensome sibling or parent is quietly extinguished. ("How tragic that our

retarded brother passed away last night. I suppose he must have been stifled by the heat.") And we're assuming that that someone has a choice; in some situations like the national eugenics programs, that choice may be nonexistent.

gwern

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Matthew Groves — 24 Sep 2008, 22:51 · in reply to Russell Wodell

Check out "The Tree is My Hat" from **Innocents Aboard**.

On Sun, Sep 21, 2008 at 5:34 PM, Russell Wodell <wrustle at gmail.com> wrote:
Hasn't Wolfe used the Shark God and the Squid God before in a fairly recent short story?

Bruce Hayles — 25 Sep 2008, 03:41 · in reply to Matthew Groves

Perhaps owing to lousy reading, I am left with a lot of fundamental questions that no one else has brought up.

Gideon gets the ambassadorship. Does this mean that he was able to get the FBI and the president what they wanted? Bill Reis dies at the end, but the goal was to understand his operations, not kill him. Has Gideon already given the president the information he wants and arranged his death? We know that Gideon has been working for him, and presumably is collecting the information he needs. Or is Reis's death completely independent of Gideon, but he's already found the information he needs? If he is behind it, how could he have foreseen the storm and Kanoa's takeover?

Was Cassie used just to make Bill Reis vulnerable? Did Gideon expect Bill Reis to love her, or did he just hope Reis interacting with her would get him closer to Reis?

The bats that save Cassie and land her on the island--is Gideon's hand in this at all?

Basically, I'm wondering if Gideon is behind the final circumstances in the book, or if they would have happened anyway. The simplest explanation is that Gideon got the information he needed and all the other events just happened. Reis caused the storm by dropping the gold over the Storm King and getting the attention of the navy, after all. If Gideon wasn't behind the final events, I suppose they are in the book to show the transformative power of love (Reis sacrificing himself). And then Cassie is going to Wondercan because she stills feels love for Gideon. On the other hand, if Gideon was behind the ending events, then he used Cassie--he gave her beauty and took it away--and perhaps she is going to Wondercan for revenge. On Wed, Sep 24, 2008 at 6:51 PM, Matthew Groves <matthewalangroves at gmail.com>

wrote:

Check out "The Tree is My Hat" from **Innocents Aboard**.

On Sun, Sep 21, 2008 at 5:34 PM, Russell Wodell <wrustle at gmail.com> wrote:

Hasn't Wolfe used the Shark God and the Squid God before in a fairly recent short story?

Matthew Keeley — 25 Sep 2008, 03:55 · in reply to Bruce Hayles

On Wed, Sep 24, 2008 at 11:41 PM, Bruce Hayles <brucehayles at gmail.com> wrote:
Perhaps owing to lousy reading, I am left with a lot of fundamental questions that no one else has brought up.

Alternatively, you're asking Big Questions while we go after smaller things...

Or is Reis's death completely independent of Gideon, but he's already found the information he needs? If he is behind it, how could he have foreseen the storm and Kanoa's takeover?

Re: takeover: The islanders apparently worshipped Hanga, but at the end Kandy suggests they actually worship the Squid God (I like how Wolfe avoids the C-word throughout the book). Perhaps the Squid God ate Hanga the way Hanga ate the king's "gaffer?" Would that make the "natives" change their allegiance?

Also - those bat again... Cassie mentions Batman when she describes them to Sharon, but says they were more "manbats." There's actually a Batman character named Man-Bat, a scientist who transforms into a bat-creature after ingesting the wrong chemicals... I'm going to assume Wolfe doesn't know this and this isn't a hint, as Wolfe doesn't seem the type to be up on Bat-trivia...

Man-Bat link: "On Leather Wings" from the Batman Animated Series:
<http://video.aol.com/video/on-leather-wings/1727987>

Speaking of Batman, I'm mildly surprised we never had a discussion of The Dark Knight here. Fantastic film I thought.

-Matt

Matthew Keeley — 25 Sep 2008, 04:09 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Have we looked at naming in An Evil Guest?

Cassiopeia - QUEEN of Ethiopia (
<http://www.astro.wisc.edu/~dolan/constellations/constellations/Cassiopeia.html>) Gideon - Biblical judge (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06402c.htm>) Rusterman (Another Reis identity) - Googled this, and found it's a bit of joke - It's a real restaurant that features in some Nero Wolfe stories.

More?

-Matt

Gwern Branwen — 04 Jan 2010, 05:50 · in reply to John Watkins

On Sun, Sep 21, 2008 at 5:23 PM, John Watkins <john.watkins04@gmail.com> wrote:
I can't answer all of that, but "Arthur Thomas Franklin" is a government agency--presumably slang for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms--the ATF (now officially Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, but still ATF).

I'm still catching up, since I *just* got it and read it, but it is without a doubt an ATF reference. There's even a Waco allusion in there!*

* If I'm not reading too much into the veiled comments about their stubbornness and propensity to violence.

gwern