

To Serve Man in Woldercan

The Urth list — 34 messages, 20 voices, 25 Sep 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5156>

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Greg Bates — 25 Sep 2008, 23:46

Just finished Evil Guest, so I can finally contribute to the discussion. Great book, btw. I'll admit I wasn't too crazy about it until about halfway in, but once they get to the Takangas the book becomes spectacular.

The more I think about it, the more Gideon Chase seems to be neither Robert Chase's son nor human, and might even be one of the "evil guests" the title implies. Wolfe calls him a 'guest' three times on the very first page, and mentions that "On Earth, the guest's name was Gideon Chase." Is Gideon someone else entirely on Woldercan? His deal with Cassie seems like a regular devil's bargain - he gives her the thing she wants most in the world, with incredible consequences. A big thing that struck me - Chase tells Cassie that there are many non-human races in the world that have sent small envoys secretly to Earth (I think the bat people are some of these and not Wolders, Klauser mentions that Wolders look 'like us, unless you look closely (e.g. Gideon's eyes)'). However, none of these races have ever made official contact with us because of the presense of Cthulhu (squid god/storm king). So what's different about Woldercan? Is Woldercan in league with Mr. Squid God? They both seem to make out well in the end - Cthulhu gets his enemy, the man who fights for "a blue island in a sea of black" murdered, and Chase becomes the ambassador to Woldercan, where he can presumably control diplomatic relations between his planet and Earth, as well as bury whatever secrets Reis stole during his time as ambassador.

I get a sort of "To Serve Man" vibe from Woldercan, to be honest. Like the aliens in TSM, the Wolders give humanity (or some humans) great wealth in the alchemical process of lead to gold. Even though they don't seem to be eating humans (Scott not withstanding), the whole book has a muted theme of shapeshifting and genetic engineering, and there might be evidence of such practices with our locals. Between Klauser's advice to Cassie to bring guns with his mentions of Wolders "trying to seduce human women" and "hybridizing with lesser forms" I get the sense that something very weird is going on with Wolder foriegn policy. Even Reis's son Rian (need to check etymology) is "defective" in some way - until the wizardly Woldercan Chase "heals" him. I can't help but think that somehow the picture Klauser gives Cassie is the climax of a hushed warning he subtly tries to give her throughout the last chapter, and there's some clue nobody's picked up on that she's heading towards a dismal fate.

Russell Wodell — 26 Sep 2008, 18:36 · in reply to Greg Bates

Isn't "Woldercan" the name of the lost city in "The Circus of Dr. Lao"?

Russell Wodell

Dave Lebling — 28 Sep 2008, 02:12 · in reply to Russell Wodell

SPOILERS BELOW (for both EG and "The Circus of Dr. Lao.")
... ..

Thanks for that hit. Indeed it is. Of course, we are never told whether Woldercan is what people of Earth call the planet, as opposed to what the Woldercan-ese call it. I pulled out my copy of "The Circus of Dr. Lao" and found (or remembered) that Woldercan is a city, the city of the god Yottle. They are in the midst of a terrible drought, and are prepared to implore Yottle to provide them water and food, when a member of the audience mocks Yottle, and instead they demand water. Yottle sends a "storm" (of words), and says (through his high priest) that before he will even listen to them, they must sacrifice their most beautiful virgin to him. The people choose the virgin, who it turns out is the betrothed of the man who suggested they demand instead of pray. The high priest prepares to bash her brains out with a stone axe, the virgin's betrothed tries to stop him, and the statue of Yottle falls on all three, killing them. Rain and manna begin to fall from the heavens.

Comparisons to the sacrifice of Reis, betrothed of the most beautiful woman on the island, aren't perfect but certainly fit closely enough.

I just finished the book tonight, and haven't fully formed my thoughts about it. A few observations though.

The book is obviously built around an homage to the pulp fiction of the 1930s. Detective story, theater story, Lovecraftian horror, detective story, "strange powers" story (notice the mention of a man named Cranston who could disappear), South Seas adventure/love story, and on and on. Wolfe is having a lot of fun here. He's also using all the cliches of the genres he includes, right up to the (grating to today's ears) naive and friendly/dangerous Natives to the Japanese Com Pu Ter who can't pronounce Ls. None of that makes any sense in 2100, but in 1935 it was what pulps had.

The Lovecraft parallels were there from the first mention of the watch. I might also mention that the "RC" (though Randolph Carter is a great guess) could also be "Raymond Chandler."

The whole business of aliens in the sea of course also brings in Wolfe's New Sun monsters, and my guess is he grinned from ear to ear as he connected them to C'thulhu and to the cliché of sacrificing someone to the storm/volcano god.

I haven't decided yet whether Cassie is going to Woldercan for revenge or to get rejuvenated. I suspect the former. Compare the whole plot to Wolfe's story about aliens seducing Earth women, "Pulp Cover." Gideon is very clearly a Woldercan/human hybrid.

I have no idea about the bat-people or the voices in the car, though I love the Truter theory on the latter and the Bates pun. If Wolfe didn't do that deliberately, he should have.

My initial reaction is that it started very slowly and became better and better until about half-way through it was very hard to put down.

More when I've thought more.

-- Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

Russell Wodell wrote:

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Russell Wodell

don doggett — 28 Sep 2008, 21:57 · in reply to Dave Lebling

Imo, Wolfe very deliberately refers to a hopper as a flier. They escape gravity in a similar manner, too. It's interesting that Reiss draws the U.S. Navy into a conflict with the Squid God/Cthulhu/Abaia(?). Could that encounter be prelude to the Ascian empire? I also wonder if the Takanga group is actually on earth.

Don

--- On Sat, 9/27/08, Dave Lebling <dlebling at hyraxes.com> wrote:

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Matt Teel — 29 Sep 2008, 15:34 · in reply to don doggett

Hello all. I'm emerging from underneath my rock to ask a question.

I've read and re-read and re-re-read Book of the New Sun, and part of the fun is figuring out how each chapter, each scene, contributes to the whole. That's hardest with the earlier chapters, I find, and particularly with Chapter VI: The Master of the Curators. I love this scene, but other than the need for Severian to get the books for Thecla, I'm wondering what the Point is.

I've gone through the Urth archives and haven't found an answer, so I thought I would bring it to the group. What does this chapter contribute to the story? I mean, on a superficial level we certainly get a feel for life in the Citadel, the stagnation of the culture; we get some interesting information about another guild ... but what else? What am I missing? Surely there's more to it than that.

Thanks.

Matt

Adam Thornton — 29 Sep 2008, 15:45 · in reply to Matt Teel

On Sep 29, 2008, at 10:34 AM, Matt Teel wrote:

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This scene establishes Nessus as Buenos Aires. The blind librarian is Borges. I believe that Cyby is a Gary-Stu. Mostly, I think it's a big tip of the hat to Borges and his influence on _BotNS_.

Adam

Matt Teel — 29 Sep 2008, 16:03 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Thanks Adam.

I did find those things in the archives (the reference to Borges is especially interesting to me). But I'm thinking all of that is pretty self-referential, and that surely there is some reason from *within the story* for the existence of this scene: some plot piece put into place, for example,

that I'm missing.

Every scene in a book generally has a number of things going on. While Wolfe's own Hitchcock-like appearance, and the reference to Borges, are interesting, I have a hunch they aren't the *reason* for the scene. And that's what's really got me stumped.

Thanks again! I appreciate your taking the time.

Matt

--- On Mon, 9/29/08, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

From: Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) a lurker asks a question

To: adeodatus43 at yahoo.com, "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Monday, September 29, 2008, 3:45 PM

On Sep 29, 2008, at 10:34 AM, Matt Teel wrote:

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Adam

aaron — 29 Sep 2008, 21:10 · in reply to Matt Teel

I can think of at least one reason for Severian's meeting Ultan, and that is their discussion of the Alzabo and the sharing of consciousness with the use of the analeptic alzabo. But, like you, I feel there is something more I am missing. The beginning of the chapter is a good example, when Sev mentions that he felt as if he and Ultan were both buried or something close to that. What does he really mean by this and when is it echoed later in the books? Maybe someone around here has a theory.

On Mon, Sep 29, 2008 at 12:03 PM, Matt Teel <adeodatus43 at yahoo.com> wrote:
Thanks Adam.

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Thanks again! I appreciate your taking the time.

Matt

--- On *Mon, 9/29/08, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>* wrote:

From: Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) a lurker asks a question

Gwern Branwen — 30 Sep 2008, 00:33 · in reply to Matt Teel

On 2008.09.29 09:03:48 -0700, Matt Teel <adeodatus43 at yahoo.com> scribbled 4.4K characters:

Thanks Adam.

I did find those things in the archives (the reference to Borges is especially interesting to me). But I'm thinking all of that is pretty self-referential, and that surely there is some reason from *within the story* for the existence of this scene: some plot piece put into place, for example, that I'm missing.

Every scene in a book generally has a number of things going on. While Wolfe's own Hitchcock-like appearance, and the reference to Borges, are interesting, I have a hunch they aren't the *reason* for the scene. And that's what's really got me stumped.

Thanks again! I appreciate your taking the time.

Matt

I've always taken this scene as serving several purposes.

For starters, it is just absolutely awesome & gorgeous writing for me, some of the best in the tetralogy. The whole reason I first came to care about Gene Wolfe's fiction was because I happened to pick up *_Shadow of the Torturer_* in the library and read through the beginning to the Ultan scene. When I finished it, I closed the book and silently added it and all the other Wolfe books there to my pile of check-outs.

Besides being brilliant, it also hammers in the Dying Earth theme, which is certainly useful. The third justification is that I believe this scene is necessary to explain how Severian obtains *_The Wonders of Urth and Sky_* (and we all know how Gene loves to be consistent and logical with the small things); *_Wonders_* is going to be a useful plot device for conversations and inserted fables/short-stories (each of which has multiple justifications, and are topics in and of themselves), so it might as well be early on where it supports Thecla's interest in intellectual matters.

As it happens, I am currently reading the collection of Wolfe interviews *_Shadows of the New Sun_*, and in it Wolfe says something along the lines of 'Severian is an intellectual who doesn't know he's an intellectual', which accords with Thecla and Severian's conversations.

(Wolfe also mentions Borges as a favorite writer 3 or 4 times, and I think twice explicitly says Ultan was a nod to him.)

gwern

Montenegro Glock ISI Sayeret CBOT BATF chameleon Visa/BCC IACIS UPI

Matthew Keeley — 30 Sep 2008, 00:41 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Mon, Sep 29, 2008 at 8:33 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

As it happens, I am currently reading the collection of Wolfe interviews

Shadows of the New Sun, and in it Wolfe says something along the lines of 'Severian is an intellectual who doesn't know he's an intellectual', which accords with Thecla and Severian's conversations.

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Montenegro Glock ISI Sayeret CBOT BATF chameleon Visa/BCC IACIS UPI

Great post. Perhaps Borges was the "real" reason for the scene - I can't think of anywhere else in *The Book of the New Sun* where such a scene with a Borges analogue would fit quite so well, though of course there are plenty of other Borges references in *New Sun* (i.e. Baldanders).

I wonder if there are any similar scenes in other works that influenced Wolfe? I, Claudius maybe? Or could it be something leftover from an earlier version of the story? Perhaps it was important to the novella "The Feast of St. Catherine?" I gather that story focused a lot on writing? Or maybe I'm wrong - I don't have my "references" (i.e. *Castle of Days*) with me at school.

-Matt, idly speculating

-Matt

Jeff Wilson — 30 Sep 2008, 05:30 · in reply to aaron

aaron wrote:

I can think of at least one reason for Severian's meeting Ultan, and that is their discussion of the Alzabo and the sharing of consciousness with the use of the analeptic alzabo. But, like you, I feel there is something more I am missing. The beginning of the chapter is a good example, when Sev mentions that he felt as if he and Ultan were both buried or something close to that. What does he really mean by this and when is it echoed later in the books? Maybe someone around here has a theory.

Much of the Citadel complex is underground. In particular, the art galleries run as far as the House Absolute, which is entirely underground, and Hypogeum Apotropaic can be read as "underground bunker". It is very likely that Severian meets Master Ultan in a tunnel, possibly a stretch of catacomb repurposed to house books instead of bodies.

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

James Wynn — 30 Sep 2008, 12:19 · in reply to Matt Teel

Matt asks:

I love this scene, but other than the need for Severian to get the books for Thecla, I'm wondering what the Point is...What does this chapter contribute to the story?
...What am I missing? Surely there's more to it than that.

When people mention to me that they feel something is going on under the floorboards in this scene, I always direct them to this clause:

"...quite suddenly I felt that he and I were dead, and the darkness surrounding us was grave soil pressing in about our eyes..."

There is something being declared here in a Lupean way -- narratively or character development-wise -- but I'll be danged if I know what it is.

J

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

From: Matt Teel

To: urth at lists.urth.net

Sent: Monday, September 29, 2008 10:34 AM

Subject: (urth) a lurker asks a question

Hello all. I'm emerging from underneath my rock to ask a question.

I've read and re-read and re-re-read Book of the New Sun, and part of the fun is figuring out how each chapter, each scene, contributes to the whole. That's hardest with the earlier chapters, I find, and particularly with Chapter VI: The Master of the Curators.

Thanks.

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James Wynn — 30 Sep 2008, 13:03 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

aaron wrote:

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Jeff Wilson said: Much of the Citadel complex is underground. It is very likely that Severian meets Master Ultan in a tunnel, possibly a stretch of catacomb repurposed to house books instead of bodies.

I guess the dead and buried sentence was already discussed. But Jeff's explanation doesn't really do it for me.

J

Adam Thornton — 30 Sep 2008, 14:55 · in reply to James Wynn

On Sep 30, 2008, at 7:19 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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narratively or character development-wise -- but I'll be danged if I
know what it is.

Somewhere--and I don't remember where--Severian also recoils when seeing a particular book,
because it seems to him like he's suddenly run across a rotting corpse. Can someone point that
citation out? I think that ties in here somewhere too.

Adam

Duncan Truter — 30 Sep 2008, 21:18 · follows Adam Thornton

start quote

Date: Tue, 30 Sep 2008 09:55:23 -0500

From: Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) a lurker asks a question

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <F9586CE5-4224-4B26-AF21-09FB9BE095AF at io.com> Content-Type: text/plain;
charset="us-ascii"; Format="flowed";

DelSp="yes"

On Sep 30, 2008, at 7:19 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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Adam

-----End quote

Is this maybe something to do with the fact that one of the books Severian picks up is The Book
Of The New Sun (it is, isn't it?) this could be why he feels he's already dead: the book is a book
of his life that he wrote, which for him hasn't happened yet but in the book it already has, and
the book is there. This may be the book he recoils from later?

Duncan

Matthew Keeley — 30 Sep 2008, 22:28 · in reply to Duncan Truter

On Sep 30, 2008, at 7:19 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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Adam

Isn't there at least one book bound in human skin in The Book of the New Sun? (In The Claw of the Conciliator, I think) Perhaps Sev's Conciliatory powers would allow him to (subconsciously) realize the nature of such a book in Ultan's library?

-Matt

Paul B — 30 Sep 2008, 22:45 · in reply to Duncan Truter

No, that's not factually accurate. The other BotNS was likely written in the Conciliator's time by Severian's fellow prisoner, and has avowedly been lost by the time when Severian is an apprentice in the Citadel.

I like the catacomb explanation just fine personally, and I never had much reason to want anything more from that chapter than the scenery it presented.

Paul

On Tue, Sep 30, 2008 at 5:18 PM, Duncan Truter <dtruter at gmail.com> wrote:

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Duncan

Jeff Wilson — 01 Oct 2008, 04:44 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:

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A page after meeting Rudesind, Sev proceeds to Ultan's study via an unrailed circular stair that descends at least 20 feet into darkness. He also passes some columns sculpted with "sleeping" faces. Upon meeting Ultan, he remarks to himself on Ultan's beard like a whitish garment and his extreme age, before discovering the man is blind, precipitating the meditation on feeling dead. A bit later, Ultan calls both Sev and Cyby young men, despite Sev estimating Cyby being in his forties. This could be a reflection on Ultan's very long exultant lifespan, or that Ultan's perception of passing time ended with his sight. He is living in the past, thus he has ceased living in the present.

Internally, this may just be Sev's reaction to the general creepiness of the situation. Externally, it may represent a burial in the years and ages gone by. (Ultan recalls the blossoming trees on the curators' feast day in the now treeless Grand Court.)

Somewhere--and I don't remember where--Severian also recoils when seeing a particular book, because it seems to him like he's suddenly run across a rotting corpse. Can someone point that citation out? I think that ties in here somewhere too.

I'd like the citation as well, please.

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

Steve McCann — 01 Oct 2008, 06:08 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

A quick run through the chapter *The Master of the Curators* in SotT and I'm not seeing this citation, even though I thought I had remembered it as well. Was the book in Baldanders castle? But I did run across this passage:

"I opened the book at random and read, '... by which means a picture might be graven with such skill that the whole of it, should it be destroyed, might be recreated from a small part, and that small part might be any part.' I suppose it was the word *graven* that suggested to me the events I had witnessed on the night I had received my chrisos." pg. 46 S&C

I'm not finding "chrisos" in the OED or via google, but the context reminds me strongly of the eucharist. Before this scene Ultan spoke of his time waiting for his master to die, so he could take his place as Librarian. All of this foreshadows Sevs becoming the Autarch, so my guess is that the function of the chapter is put this possibility in play.

-S

On Tue, Sep 30, 2008 at 10:44 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

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Jeff Wilson — 01 Oct 2008, 07:30 · in reply to Steve McCann

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The chrisos is the coin Vodalus gave him.

There is a bit of Autarch succession nearby, in that a circular room of books has been kept for three centuries pending the return of Autarch Sulpicius.

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

Mo Holkar / UKG — 01 Oct 2008, 10:59 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

At 08:30 01/10/2008, Jeff wrote:

The chrisos is the coin Vodalus gave him.

From the Greek chrysos, gold. Although it may also be a play on the English root chris-, meaning to do with anointment, from the Greek chrisai (to anoint) which also of course gives Christos. I don't have enough Greek to know whether the two roots are related in that language or if it's just a coincidence.

best,

Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki now at:

<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>

James Wynn — 01 Oct 2008, 13:33 · in reply to Steve McCann

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The citation is Claw chapter 21. It is during Sev's discussion with the androgyne. The book is the one with mirrors for pages. Personally, Sev's reaction doesn't give me the same feeling as the comment about himself and Ultan.

Adam Thornton — 01 Oct 2008, 14:22 · in reply to Steve McCann

On Oct 1, 2008, at 1:08 AM, Steve McCann wrote:

A quick run through the chapter The Master of the Curators in SotT and I'm not seeing this citation, even though I thought I had remembered it as well. Was the book in Baldanders castle? But I did run across this passage:

I don't think it's in _Master of the Curators_.

I'm not convinced it's even in the New Sun books, actually.

But the passage you quoted:

"I opened the book at random and read, '... by which means a picture might be graven with such skill that the whole of it, should it be destroyed, might be recreated from a small part, and that small part might be any part.'

I suppose it was the word graven that suggested to me the events I had witnessed on the night I had received my chrisos." pg. 46 S&C

Here's Wolfe messing with us again.

Of course it's not "graven" that's the key, at least not to anyone but Severian. It's the holographic nature of this memory storage device, and the fact that the analeptic alzado lets you eat a tiny part of someone's brain and then subsume his or her memories and personality.

Adam

Bruce Hayles — 01 Oct 2008, 20:27 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Gwern mentioned an interview with Gene Wolfe saying that Severian is an intellectual that doesn't know he is an intellectual. "It's a pity you are a torturer, " Ultan said. "You might have been a philosopher..." on pg 47. Reading Severian's narrative, I can't help but think he is an intellectual; but his narrative never really reveals that he thinks of himself as such (consistent with the quote from Wolfe). I don't recall specific instances, but Severian does think of himself as dense. For example, when he cannot explain why the claw only heals at certain times he thinks himself slow. So maybe this chapter serves to validate the idea that Severian is an intellectual by showing that other people (Ultan) think so.

Along the same line, the chapter points out of incongruity of Severian as a torturer. We are forced to compare Cyby and Severian. On pg 45 Ultan describes the process whereby apprentices are selected. "He hesitated, and though I could discern no expression on his face, I received the impression that he feared what he was about to say might cause Cyby pain." And afterwards, when Severian says that the guild takes such children as they can, Ultan mutters, "We do the same." The implication seems to be that Cyby is a less than ideal apprentice. This combined with Ultan's previous observation of Severian's intellectualism seems to suggest an alternate reality in which Severian was an apprentice to the librarian. I would like to draw this out further by saying that Cyby is incurious and would make a good torturer, but I do not see any evidence for it in the text (perhaps I missed it.)

Another purpose of the chapter is to show the internal conflict Severian is having between his pledge to Vodalus and his duty to his guild. He asks Severian whose apprentice he is, and Severian hesitates (long enough for Ultan to actually repeat his question) and recalls the scene with Vodalus. Clearly Severian has yet to come to terms with his acceptance of the chrisos (the pledge to Vodalus) and his duty to the guild.

Steve McCann — 01 Oct 2008, 20:47 · in reply to Adam Thornton

It seems that the only way graven could be important here is if the Alzabo was a beast engineered to afford the transference of past lives.

-S

On Wed, Oct 1, 2008 at 8:22 AM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

Here's Wolfe messing with us again.

Of course it's not "graven" that's the key, at least not to anyone but Severian. It's the holographic nature of this memory storage device, and the fact that the analeptic alzabo lets you eat a tiny part of someone's brain and then subsume his or her memories and personality.

Adam

Adam Thornton — 01 Oct 2008, 21:42 · in reply to Steve McCann

On Oct 1, 2008, at 3:47 PM, Steve McCann wrote:

It seems that the only way graven could be important here is if the Alzabo was a beast engineered to afford the transference of past lives.

....

Huh.

And here I'd always assumed that eating someone's BRAAAAAAIAIN and taking over their memory and personality would simply be a competitive advantage in eating their families, as we see in Sword.

BRAAAAAAINS. Wolfe's got 'em.

Adam

Gwern Branwen — 03 Oct 2008, 19:50 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On 2008.09.29 20:41:15 -0400, Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com> scribbled 3.6K characters:

Great post. Perhaps Borges was the "real" reason for the scene - I can't think of anywhere else in The Book of the New Sun where such a scene with a Borges analogue would fit quite so well, though of course there are plenty of other Borges references in New Sun (i.e. Baldanders).

We may never know, unless someone asks him 'Did you write that scene really because you just like Borges a lot and it's a nice scene?'

Although I've always found Baldanders a bit odd - I looked him up in my copy of the Borges bestiary and I don't see much of a connection. If anything, the alzabo is much closer to Borges's Baldanders than Wolfe's Baldanders.

I wonder if there are any similar scenes in other works that influenced Wolfe? I, Claudius maybe? Or could it be something leftover from an earlier version of the story? Perhaps it was important to the novella "The Feast of St. Catherine?" I gather that story focused a lot on writing? Or maybe I'm wrong - I don't have my "references" (i.e. Castle of Days) with me at school.

-Matt, idly speculating

I dunno. I don't remember the descriptions I've seen of the novella focusing a lot on writing, but I didn't pay much attention to it. Has anyone here read it or know much about it?

gwern

Armani rounds World 7NL Medco Bunny Consul TECS ssor SBI

Gwern Branwen — 03 Oct 2008, 20:02 · in reply to Bruce Hayles

On 2008.10.01 16:27:51 -0400, Bruce Hayles <brucehayles at gmail.com> scribbled 4.7K characters:

Gwern mentioned an interview with Gene Wolfe saying that Severian is an intellectual that doesn't know he is an intellectual. "It's a pity you are a torturer, " Ultan said. "You might have been a philosopher..." on pg 47. Reading Severian's narrative, I can't help but think he is an intellectual; but his narrative never really reveals that he thinks of himself as such (consistent with the quote from Wolfe). I don't recall specific instances, but Severian does think of himself as dense. For example, when he cannot explain why the claw only heals at certain times he thinks himself slow. So maybe this chapter serves to validate the idea that Severian is an intellectual by showing that other people (Ultan) think so.

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...

Hm, but how would this Librarian-past work? The librarians only take young children who read so much they find the Book of Gold; so would this past be one in which Severian was not taken by the torturers and in which he lived in the citadel regardless? Or could he still have been taken by the torturers but found his way to the Book of Gold and then taken by the librarians?

gwern

Armani rounds World 7NL Medco Bunny Consul TECS ssor SBI

Bruce Hayles — 03 Oct 2008, 20:55 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

I didn't mean "alternate reality" literally. I mean that were circumstances different for Severian you can see him being a good librarian. That is, if Severian had different parents and lived in the citadel and he ended up reading a lot in the library, perhaps he would have been taken as an apprentice of the librarians. The guild (if I remember correctly) takes orphans (such as they can get) small enough that their heads are below the phallus of some statue. I don't think Severian could be taken by the librarians while being an apprentice torturer.

On Fri, Oct 3, 2008 at 4:02 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

On 2008.10.01 16:27:51 -0400, Bruce Hayles <brucehayles at gmail.com> scribbled 4.7K characters:

Gwern mentioned an interview with Gene Wolfe saying that Severian is an intellectual that doesn't know he is an intellectual. "It's a pity you are a torturer, "

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is an intellectual; but his narrative never really reveals that he thinks of himself as such (consistent with the quote from Wolfe). I don't recall specific instances, but Severian does think of himself as dense. For example, when he cannot explain why the claw only heals at certain times he thinks himself slow. So maybe this chapter serves to validate the idea that Severian is an intellectual by showing that other people (Ultan) think so.

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--

gvern

Armani rounds World 7NL Medco Bunny Consul TECS ssor SBI

-----BEGIN PGP SIGNATURE-----

Version: GnuPG v1.4.9 (GNU/Linux)

iEYEAREKAAYFAkjmejgACgkQvpDo5Pfl1oKKoQCfeuMe2jomCiH9WBi7PyjQL6+e
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Matthew Keeley — 04 Oct 2008, 17:39 · in reply to don doggett

On Sun, Sep 28, 2008 at 5:57 PM, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:

Imo, Wolfe very deliberately refers to a hopper as a flier. They escape gravity in a similar manner, too. It's interesting that Reiss draws the U.S. Navy into a conflict with the Squid God/Cthulhu/Abaia(?). Could that encounter be prelude to the Ascian empire? I also wonder if the Takanga group is actually on earth.

Don

Of course, "hoppers" also tie into "Memorare." I even recall a line about the moons of Jupiter in An Evil Guest?

Re: Takanga group: Well, Wolfe does go to great lengths to set out a geographical location for it (near Australia), but it does seem rather otherworldly, and I suppose Cthulhu could mess about with space-time a bit. And the Navy can sail there - perhaps it's a bit like the Bermuda Triangle?

Some part of me wonders if the US Navy could take on the Squid God. They seem to be losing when we see them fight, but they could always come back with bigger guns (i.e, nukes) - though I wouldn't want to see what happens if Great C. got his tentacles on those... I must say, I lost some sympathy for Reis when he tricks the Navy into fighting Cthulhu unprepared... He has his reasons, but he's a bit of a bastard nonetheless.

On an unrelated note, has anyone looked into Le Fanu's The Evil Guest yet? Was the Irish horror writer an influence on HPL?

-Matt

Fernando Q. Gouvêa — 04 Oct 2008, 18:53 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Matthew Keeley wrote:

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There is an island near New Zealand called Takangaroa... From the Wikipedia entry, one guesses that Takanga might be Maori for "net".

Fernando

=====

Fernando Q. Gouvea
Carter Professor of Mathematics
Colby College Editor, MAA FOCUS
5836 Mayflower Hill Editor, MAA Reviews
Waterville, ME 04901 <http://mathdl.maa.org/mathDL/19/>
<http://www.colby.edu/~fqgouvea>

Q: How did you get into artificial intelligence?

A: Seemed logical -- I didn't have any real intelligence.

Andy Robertson — 05 Oct 2008, 09:03 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Matthew Keeley writes:

Some part of me wonders if the US Navy could take on the Squid God. They seem to be losing when we see them fight, but they could always come back with bigger guns (i.e, nukes)

If you nuke Cthulhu he reforms in five minutes

- but now he's radioactive!!!

Chaosium CALL OF CTHULHU rules.

hartshorn

Fred Kiesche — 05 Oct 2008, 11:42 · in reply to Andy Robertson

August Derleth nuked Cthulhu in one of his novels. I'd tell you which one, but some rat busturd stole it from me...

F.P. Kiesche III "Ah Mr. Gibbon, another damned, fat, square book. Always, scribble, scribble, scribble, eh?" (The Duke of Gloucester, on being presented with Volume 2 of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.) Blogging at The Lensman's Children and TexasBestGrok!

--- On Sun, 10/5/08, Andy Robertson <andywrobertson at clara.co.uk> wrote: From: Andy Robertson <andywrobertson at clara.co.uk> Subject: Re: (urth) Nuking Cthulhu To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Sunday, October 5, 2008, 5:03 AM

Matthew Keeley writes:

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hartshorn

Cliff Judge — 08 Oct 2008, 16:49 · in reply to Andy Robertson

I haven't read the book yet, but if there is some kind of conflict between cthulu and the US military, then shame on you for spoiling it.

On Sun, Oct 5, 2008 at 5:03 AM, Andy Robertson <andywrobertson at clara.co.uk> wrote:
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