

Random thoughts on AEG

The Urth list — 12 messages, 5 voices, 29 Oct 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5202>

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Nigel Price — 29 Oct 2008, 15:15

Just tossing some random half-thoughts, ideas and speculations around here...

1 If Bill Reis is a Christ figure, is the US president's desire to gain his secret of manufacturing gold analogous to the people's reaction to the feeding of the 5,000. They search for Jesus, but only because they want more bread, not because they understand the significance of the miracle (John 6.26)?

2 I'm still not sure about the significance of gold in AEG, especially as the quotation from Simonides at the start of the book refers to gold as "an evil guest". It seems much more natural to interpret the squid god as THE evil guest in the story. On the other hand, it's Reis' willingness to give his gold away, or at least use it as a lure for the US Navy, that leads to the attack on the squid's sunken city. The gold proves to be an unwelcome guest for Squiddie.

3 We can find all sorts of meanings and associations for the name "Gideon", but the association that springs to mind for most people ("Rocky Raccoon", anyone?) is "Gideon's bible", referring to a bible placed in a hotel room or hospital by the Gideons International organisation. So, could the name "Gideon Chase" be meant to refer to the bible in some way? The character's surname, "Chase", surely refers to the fact that he acts as a detective. He's "chasing" Bill Reis. So, are we to suppose that in some allegorical fashion, it's the bible that starts Cassie's search for Christ? If that were the case, her and Chase's initial interpretation of Reis' nature is clearly wrong... Or is it just that Reis himself changes, and becomes more Christ-like?

4 Does Gideon Chase remind anyone else around here of Bruce Wayne/Batman? Maybe it's his black super-car/hopper that brought that association to mind. Many of the Batman films have emphasised 1940s design values. I wonder whether they influenced the design values in AEG (see 6 below!)?

5 Is Cassie, who has been married twice before and loves both Chase and Reis, another of Wolfe's Gomer/whorish-wife figures? (See Hosea 1.1ff and compare Silk's love for Hyacinth in "Long Sun".) The unworthy and unfaithful but deeply loved woman who represents Israel/the church...

6 Is there a King Kong subtext buried somewhere in this novel? As others have pointed out, Wolfe has written the novel as though it were an 1930s/40s film. The characterisations and even the dialogue are right out of a black and white film of that era. Some people have reacted negatively to these aspects and see scenes like the encounter with the mountie as just bad, whereas I think that what Wolfe is doing is a thorough pastiche of films from this period, including the quips and smart-alec dialogue that can often sound laboured to our ears now. But did Wolfe have a specific film in mind? Maybe it's just the South Sea Island theme that emerges late in AEG that reminds me of "King Kong", but that film too is about sacrifice. At one point, the tribe on Skull Island offer the film's heroine as a sacrifice to their god Kong, but he falls in love

with her and carries her off rather than devouring her. He defends her from other monsters (dinosaurs) on Skull Island and later, in New York, protects her (in a manner or speaking) from the aircraft that shoot at him while he's climbing the Empire State Building. There was a recent film remake of "King Kong"... Is Reis, the financial giant, a metaphorical Kong substitute, tamed by Cassie's loveliness? "It was beauty killed the beast!"

7 Is there a Chestertonian "Man who was Thursday" thing going on AEG? The hero in Chesterton's novel is a detective recruited to go after the seven members of the Central Council of Anarchists, each of whom, when he corners them, turns out to be another under-cover detective on the same mission. The seventh and last member of the council, Sunday, turns out to be a Christ-like figure rather than a super villain. Is this the basic template for AEG? Cassie is recruited to go after a super villain who turns out not to be a villain but a Christ-figure?

Just thinking aloud here! Comments, anyone?

Nigel

Nigel Price — 29 Oct 2008, 16:07 · follows Nigel Price

8 Was anyone else struck by the thought that Wolfe is making a wicked pun by calling Cassie's agent Zelda Youmans?

I take it that "Zelda Youmans" stands for "sell the humans".

Whether this is just a little joke about agents, or whether it is a comment on Zelda's allegiances, I'm not sure. I rather assume the former, but I'm happy to hear a case for the latter.

Nigel

Matthew King — 29 Oct 2008, 16:31 · in reply to Nigel Price

On Wed, Oct 29, 2008 at 11:07 AM, Nigel Price <nigelaprice at talktalk.net> wrote:
8 Was anyone else struck by the thought that Wolfe is making a wicked pun by calling Cassie's agent Zelda Youmans?

I take it that "Zelda Youmans" stands for "sell the humans".

Hide the weapons from the women, in the case you should faint.

Nigel Price — 29 Oct 2008, 20:01 · follows Matthew King

6 King Kong

Sorry, I didn't read the early messages on AEG because at the time I still hadn't got my copy of the book. I'm rereading them now and see that Don Doggett mentioned King Kong in his very first, non-spoiler, review of AEG:

And this is a pulp novel, from the cover to the last page. It riffs on Lovecraft, The Circus of Dr. Lao (absolute required reading before or after reading this book), King Kong, The Shadow, and god knows what else.

Kudos to Don for being their first by a long way!

Nigel

Nigel Price — 29 Oct 2008, 20:02 · follows Nigel Price

...Or even "there" first!

N.

Nigel Price — 29 Oct 2008, 21:28 · follows Nigel Price

4 OK, on Wed Sep 24 20:55:32 PDT 2008, Matthew Keeley had already picked up on the Batman thing and mentioned what I had noticed while reading but forgotten while writing, namely that Cassie specifically refers to Batman, albeit in the context of describing the alien bat-like creatures.

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.

But this doesn't pick up on the Gideon as Batman question.

I'd better keep reading through the last two months' worth of AEG discussion!

Nigel

Adam Thornton — 29 Oct 2008, 21:31 · in reply to Nigel Price

On Oct 29, 2008, at 4:28 PM, Nigel Price wrote:
4 OK, on Wed Sep 24 20:55:32 PDT 2008, Matthew Keeley had already picked up on the Batman thing and mentioned what I had noticed while reading but forgotten while writing, namely that Cassie specifically refers to Batman, albeit in the context of describing the alien bat-like creatures.

"Bats with Baby Faces" -- anyone fancy having a go at the Eliot connection?

Adam

Brian Lovely — 29 Oct 2008, 22:28 · follows Adam Thornton

QUOTE

So, could the name "Gideon Chase" be meant to refer to the bible in some way QUOTE

I haven't read AEG, but I couldn't help butting in. A Gideon bible is placed by an outside actor (member of Gideon International) in case it is needed (midnight crisis of faith on the road). Could this somehow describe Gideon Chase?

--Brian

Nigel Price — 30 Oct 2008, 00:58 · follows Brian Lovely

6 I raised King Kong, 30s pulp and reproducing the cliches of the genre: Dave Lebling addressed the whole 30s pulp issue brilliantly back on Sat Sep 27 19:12:09 PDT 2008...

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.

Yes, and we can include the awful faux English accent of King Kanoa, which reproduces the awfully mannered accents used by supposedly British characters in American films of the 30s and 40s.

While we're on King Kanoa ("King Canoe"? King Canute?), there are a couple of spellings in AEG that had me wondering whether the book was either poorly proofread (like my posts!) or set in a parallel universe. King Kanoa refers to his school as "Eaton", when he presumably means "Eton", and earlier in the book, Gideon Chase quotes a poet he refers to as "Spencer", when he actually means Edmund Spenser. (Others have made the same mistake, including those who arranged his memorial in Westminster Abbey, if memory serves me right, but still, Wolfe should know it's Spenser with an S!)

For anyone interested, Gideon chase quotes Spenser on page 78 of AEG:

Gideon nodded to himself as he signed.
"One may buy gold at a price too deare."
Who said that? Spencer?"

The quotation comes from line 108 of the August eclogue in Spenser's "The Shepheardes Calender". The phrase is proverbial, however, and Spenser was neither the first nor last to use it.

In the context of allegorical interpretations of AEG and the significance of gold in the story, Matthew Henry's use of the proverb is interesting. In his "Concise Commentary", he writes concerning the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price in Matthew 13.44-52:

A man may buy gold too dear, but not this
Pearl of great price.

Nigel

Matthew Keeley — 30 Oct 2008, 03:29 · in reply to Nigel Price

On Wed, Oct 29, 2008 at 8:58 PM, Nigel Price <nigelaprice at talktalk.net> wrote:

Yes, and we can include the awful faux English accent of King Kanoa, which reproduces the awfully mannered accents used by supposedly British characters in American films of the 30s and 40s.

While we're on King Kanoa ("King Canoe"? King Canute?), there are a couple of spellings in AEG that had me wondering whether the book was either poorly proofread (like my posts!) or set in a parallel universe. King Kanoa refers to his school as "Eaton", when he presumably means "Eton", and earlier in the book, Gideon Chase quotes a poet he refers to as "Spencer", when he actually means Edmund Spenser. (Others have made the same mistake, including those who arranged his memorial in Westminster Abbey, if memory serves me right, but still, Wolfe should know it's Spenser with an S!)

Nigel

Is the pulp being referenced exclusively American? King Kanoa's English actually wouldn't be too out-of-place in some English novels. Consider Lord Peter Wimsey's parody / epitome of that sort of chatty Brit in Dorothy Sayers' novels. Or the two cricket fans in Hitchcock's film *The Lady Vanishes* (who reappear in some non-Hitchcock films).

From a website on names for children:

The boy's name Kanoa \k(a)-noa\ is pronounced ka-NOH-ah. It is of Hawaiian origin, and its meaning is "the free one."

I remember one interview where Wolfe discussed the importance of freedom in AEG and how Gid may be "the most free of all."

-Matt

Nigel Price — 30 Oct 2008, 09:45 · follows Matthew Keeley

Matthew Keeley wrote:

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King Kanoa's English actually wouldn't be too out-of-place in some English novels. Consider Lord Peter Wimsey's parody / epitome of that sort of chatty Brit in Dorothy Sayers' novels. Or the two cricket fans in Hitchcock's film *The Lady Vanishes* (who reappear in some non-Hitchcock films).

The two cricket fans in "*The Lady Vanishes*" are called Charters and Caldicott.

Your point about the exaggerated speech patterns in British literature and films of the period is well made, though my impression remains that Wolfe is primarily referencing American models in AEG.

I remember one interview where Wolfe discussed the importance of freedom in AEG and how Gid may be "the most free of all."

Can you remember which interview this was?

Nigel

Matthew Keeley — 30 Oct 2008, 15:28 · in reply to Nigel Price

On Thu, Oct 30, 2008 at 5:45 AM, Nigel Price <nigelaprice at talktalk.net> wrote:

Can you remember which interview this was?

Nigel

No, and it's driving me nuts. I don't think I hallucinated it, but not having much luck with Google at the moment.

-Matt