

Change of Topic: Latro

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 04 Nov 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5207>

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PMorris33 at aol.com — 04 Nov 2008, 01:56

Does anyone know if a fourth book in the Soldier series is being contemplated? After all, Latro has not been returned to his home.

In a message dated 11/3/2008 5:09:14 P.M. Pacific Standard Time, urth-request at lists.urth.net writes:

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When replying, please edit your Subject line so it is more specific than "Re: Contents of Urth digest..."

Today's Topics:

1. Re: AEG: Is AEG Lovecraftian? (Bryan Alexander)
2. Stingray (Nigel Price)
3. Stingray (Nigel Price)
4. Re: Stingray (James Wynn)
5. AEG: Is AEG Lovecraftian? (Nigel Price)
6. Stingray (Nigel Price)
7. Re: Stingray (Matthew Keeley)

Message: 1

Date: Mon, 3 Nov 2008 17:10:48 -0500

From: "Bryan Alexander" <bryan.alexander at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) AEG: Is AEG Lovecraftian?

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

Message-ID:

<a55c3dff0811031410h6cd912e8t9690b7f7b5bd81ba at mail.gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

I admit to bringing a Lovecraftian perspective to my reading of AEG. That was due in part to various things I'd heard about the novel, which were then brought to mind with the HPL inscription. So I suspected far more cosmic horror from various quarters, including the flapping creature, than I ended

up with.

My Phil Dick-style expectations were confirmed instead.

On Mon, Nov 3, 2008 at 3:55 PM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Kieran Mullen wrote:

That needs a bit of explanation. For a work to be Lovecraftian I don't think it is simply sufficient to stick in Hastur and Cthulu and call it that. Lovecraft (IMO) came up with a truly original ontological horror premise for his fiction: the universe is dominated by inhuman forces which we don't have a hope of understanding or defeating. At best we can only hope that they ignore us. (We can't even pray that they do - there is no God, only atoms and a void). Humanity is a minor irrelevance in a dark and hungry universe. Any attempt to try to change that will only draw the attention of forces that will destroy the inquirer.

Given that Wolfe is a Christian I doubt very much that he would write a work consistent with such a nihilistic Lovecraftian premise. But other writers, such as August Derleth (also a Christian), have expanded the Lovecraft universe to include a more classical view of good vs. evil. To me, true horror cannot exist in a universe where our ideas of sanity and goodness are a mere fluke, a cosmic joke. The efforts of the protagonists become simply silly.

But I don't think the Lovecraft parts are simply tacked on. From the beginning Reis announced his intention to retire to the South Seas (p. 14). This cannot be a coincidence. Reis may have learned something during his time as ambassador to Woldercan. He may have realized there was a connected menace on Earth and determined to fight it. To some degree his provoking a fight between Squiddy and the Navy seems to have been a success. At the very least the storms took out many Cthulhu worshipers on the neighboring islands.

Even Lovecraft allowed the forces of good to succeed sometimes, for example in "The Dunwich Horror." Even he could not help rooting for humanity against the monsters.

Urth Mailing List

James Wynn — 04 Nov 2008, 02:13 · in reply to PMorris33 at aol.com

Actually, I don't think Latro will ever get home until he passes through India, Micronesia, Columbia, Ireland, Britain, Germania, and Slavakia. I asked Wolfe once if he anticipated a wrap-up to the series and he said no.

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

From: PMorris33 at aol.com

To: urth at lists.urth.net

Sent: Monday, November 03, 2008 7:56 PM

Subject: (urth) Change of Topic: Latro

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

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<a55c3dff0811031410h6cd912e8t9690b7f7b5bd81ba at mail.gmail.com>

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Matthew Keeley — 04 Nov 2008, 04:06 · in reply to James Wynn

On Mon, Nov 3, 2008 at 9:13 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
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You forgot Japan and China.

I wouldn't mind Latro in Ireland - Wolfe seems to have a penchant for Irish myth, but I don't know how much he's explored it outside of short stories and Peace. I wouldn't mind reading Latro meets Cu Chulainn and the leprechauns...

-Matt

Matthew Keeley — 04 Nov 2008, 04:10 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

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I need to proofread these messages more - two uses of the "I wouldn't mind" construction in two sentences. I apologize for the offense to good English.

Anyone know if Wolfe has spent time in Ireland? Or just read a lot of Yeats?

-Matt

brunians at brunians.org — 04 Nov 2008, 14:41 · in reply to James Wynn

He was home for a while off-stage, between volume two and volume three.

He forgets.

.

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> _____
> Urth Mailing List
> To post, write urth at urth.net
> Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>
>

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Bryan Alexander

<http://infocult.typepad.com/>

<http://twitter.com/BryanAlexander>

----- next part -----

An HTML attachment was scrubbed...

URL:

<<http://lists.urth.net/pipermail/urth-urth.net/attachments/20081103/cdec52ad/attachment-0001.htm>

>

Message: 2

Date: Mon, 3 Nov 2008 22:33:59 -0000

From: "Nigel Price" <nigelaprice at talktalk.net>

Subject: (urth) Stingray

To: "Urth List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <AFEFKBJKJDDJOMBNACBNGEEMDNAA.nigelaprice at talktalk.net>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

As I was writing about evil undersea cities and civilisations in AEG

and the

Urth Cycle, one part of my mind facetiously wandered and wondered

whether

Gene Wolfe had ever watched the Gerry Anderson puppet show "Stingray"

in the

1960s. As I thought whimsically about it, the parallels scattered through his books became stronger and stranger. Was Seawrack inspired by Marina? Was the idea of the US Navy attacking the Storm God inspired by the sight of Troy Tempest and the WASPs attacking Titan and his aquaphibian minions?

No, of course not, it's a silly idea. It's not as if Wolfe ever refers to puppetry in his stories.

Hang on there, wait a minute...

What about that dream Severian has of the toy theatre and the marionette versions of himself and Baldander?

Goodness! If I'm right, anything can happen in the next half hour...

Nigel (in a playful mood)

Message: 3

Date: Mon, 3 Nov 2008 23:00:41 -0000

From: "Nigel Price" <nigelaprice at talktalk.net>

Subject: (urth) Stingray

To: "Urth List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <AFEFKBJKJDDJOMBNA CBNOEEMDNAA.nigelaprice at talktalk.net>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

Weird but true: Gerry Anderson and Ray Harryhausen were both speakers at the 1987 WorldCon in Brighton, England, which Gene and Rosemary Wolfe also attended.

Did Wolfe hear Gerry Anderson talk about his work?

Then again, for anyone interested in creating submarine squid deities, Harryhausen's amusing account of animating the six-limbed giant octopus in "It came from beneath the sea" might well have been inspirational. (The octopus only had six limbs because Harryhausen was on a tight budget and an even tighter timetable. Animating extra limbs takes time, and time is money!)

Nigel (who is trying to write a serious analysis of AEG - coming soon - but keeps getting distracted by whimsical notions)

Message: 4

Date: Mon, 3 Nov 2008 17:57:00 -0600

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Stingray

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

Message-ID: <8349DBE9E74F4391A5D742992EE9395D at GATEWAY>

Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";
reply-type=original

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> puppetry in his stories.

In The Book of the Short Sun, Horn remembers the following from his
childhood:

"I once had a toy, a little wooden man in a blue coat who was moved by
strings. When I played with him, I made him walk and bow, and spoke
for him.

I practiced until I thought myself very clever. One day I saw my
mother

holding the two sticks that held his strings, and my little wooden man
saluting my youngest sister much more cleverly than I could have made
him do

it, and laughing with his head thrown back, then mourning with his
face in

his hands. I never spoke of it to my mother, but I was angry and
ashamed."

On Blue's Waters, pg. 158

Soon he after he was assaulted by the triple-jawed leatherskin---an
obvious

reference to Pinnochio's Dog-fish.

J.

Message: 5

Date: Tue, 4 Nov 2008 00:04:01 -0000

From: "Nigel Price" <nigelaprice at talktalk.net>

Subject: (urth) AEG: Is AEG Lovecraftian?

To: "Urth List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <AFEFKBJKJDDJOMBNAACBNCEENDNAA.nigelaprice at talktalk.net>

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Kieran Mullen asks...

>>So what do you think? Is AEG just a romp

>>through different genres or is it really meant

>>to be a horror novel?

No, I don't think that AEG is a Lovecraftian horror story in the sense that you define. As far as I understand - which is not very far at all - it borrows some Lovecraftian elements, but does not share their underlying philosophy, their "ontological horror premise" (great phrase!).

I've read back through all the posts here on AEG and I've reread bits of the story but I still don't really understand how all the parts of the book fit together. I'm trying to work it out. The nature of Gideon Chase seems to be key. That in turn, because Gideon was born there and is probably a human-Woldercanese hybrid, is tied up with the moral status of the planet Woldercan.

Wolfe depicts Woldercan as a place which has talking fish, dangerous forests, alchemy and different physics. The inhabitants superficially resemble humans but are subtly different. They can breed successfully with lower animals, including humans, and male Woldercaners try to seduce and mate with human females. All in all, Woldercan sounds more like Fairyland than a conventional science fiction alien planet. If it is a sort of SF Fairyland, that would make the Wolders fairies, or fairy analogues anyway.

The moral status of fairies and Fairyland is moot in the European tradition. Sometimes they are morally equivalent to humans, with the "good" and "bad" fairies familiar in children's stories. Often, though, they are depicted as being amoral and "other", outside human schemes of morality and, when their stories get merged with the Christian tradition, outside the divine scheme of salvation.

Yet another tradition, evident in stories like that of Tam Lin and some versions of Thomas the Rhymer, has Fairyland as a subsidiary dominion of Hell to which it pays tax (usually every seven years) in the form of human souls. Fairies in this tradition become similar to devils or demons.

In the opening chapter of AEG, Gideon tells the President that there is no such thing as good and evil. His position seems to be that there is no such thing as absolute good or evil, only things that we ourselves

disapprove of.

If he means that no person is ever wholly good or wholly evil, he must surely be right. If he means that good and evil do not themselves exist, then, from Wolfe's perspective as a Christian, he must surely be wrong. He seems to mean both, which is confusing!

Gideon's perspective is either that of an amoral alien, analogous to the amoral fairies I described above, with no human sense of good or evil, or he himself is evil and is deceiving others with his untruths, which makes him more of the "demonic" type of alien/fairy.

Wolfe has stated in interviews that his starting point for AEG was the idea of a detective who was a wizard. Gideon is a wizard, and certainly the archetypal wizard, Merlin, is half-human and half-devil in some accounts of his parentage.

By this account, Gideon is at best amoral and at worst positively evil.

At the start of AEG, the President of the United States attempts to recruit Gideon to work with the FBI in catching Bill Reis. In many stories, certainly in the 1930s pulp stories which Wolfe is pastiching, this would make Gideon the good guy, an untouchable science fictional Eliot Ness. But there's a strong element of satire in AEG. The USA over which the President presides is a place where abortion has become legalised child murder, and where the various federal agencies fight an endless turf war against each other, possibly under the manipulative influence of demonic submarine aliens. The moral status of the President in this story is pretty cloudy, especially as we later come to see that Bill Reis himself may be far from being the evildoer the President claims. As the President's agent, Gideon's moral status is equally suspect.

That's at the start of the story. Does Gideon change?

I'm not clear in my own mind whether Bill Reis starts off bad but is changed by the transforming power of his love for Cassie, or whether he was always good and it just takes Cassie and the reader a long time to find the correct moral orientation within the confusing landscapes of AEG. I think that

there's at least an element of the former because Bill Reis learned his alchemy and other tricks on the morally dubious Woldercan.

Either way, Gideon's transforms Cassie into a star (her name, after all, is that of an astronomical star) and its her loveliness which captures both Gideon and Bill Reis' hearts. Somehow, this love helps to orientate all three of them. Cassie chooses to marry Bill and Gideon goes to work for him, although he doesn't seem to break his agreement with the President so much as suspend it.

That seems to be one half of the story. Bill is inspired to self-sacrifice, Cassie loves the Christ-like Bill and Gideon is working, at least for the moment, for the good guys. Gideon may have transformed Cassie into a star in order to trap Reis, but the her power of beauty has transformed all three of them for the better.

But the other half of the story seems to involve putting the bad guys into a properly inverted hierarchy of wickedness.

Cassie's story of how she came to love the neighbour's dog is instructive in this context. Scared of the neighbour's dog but even more scared of her violently abusive father, she finds herself sheltering with the animal and accepting its protection. Her clear perception of the greater source of danger enables her to accept the dog just as she later accepts the help of the bat creatures which would otherwise have terrified her in order to escape the agents of the evil Storm God.

The US Navy act as agents of the bad American President and pursue Bill Reis for his gold. Reis uses that gold, however, to direct them against the Squid God. If the US President, his navy and other agencies are not made virtuous as such, they are at least properly directed against the greater evil of the malevolent underwater alien.

I still don't fully understand the ending. Why does Gideon return to Woldercan? Because it is his true home? Perhaps it's because the spell of Cassie's star quality has been broken and without it he has fallen

from
virtue back to his old immoral/amoral ways. I don't know what Cassie
is
looking for.

As an allegory, AEG is confusing. But I don't think it is an allegory
any
more than it's Lovecraftian horror. It uses allegory, or has an
allegorical
dimension, but there's a lot more going on and the correspondences
between
characters and qualities seem to be dynamic rather than static.

Nigel

Message: 6
Date: Tue, 4 Nov 2008 00:10:14 -0000
From: "Nigel Price" <nigelaprice at talktalk.net>
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Thanks for that, James. I'd forgotten about that marionette reference
in
OBW.

There's the story "The Toy Theater" in TloDDaOSaOS too. That's all
about
marionettes.

I started this thread as a sort of joke on myself, but now I'm really
beginning to wonder!

Nigel

Message: 7
Date: Mon, 3 Nov 2008 20:08:43 -0500
From: "Matthew Keeley" <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Stingray

Jeff Wilson — 04 Nov 2008, 17:21 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

brunians at brunians.org, crushtv at gmail.com, and PMorris33 at aol.com, kindly trim the
quoted material in your reply posts. You can read more about this genteel practice here:

<http://www.greenend.org.uk/rjk/2000/06/14/quoting.html>

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