

AEG: Dr. Lao and Woldercan

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 21 Sep 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5489>

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Roy C. Lackey — 21 Sep 2009, 05:53

Back on the 14th, Allan Anderson wrote:

To snip a perhaps apropos phrase from Dr. Lao's Wikipedia summary, "...the mythical city of 'Woldercan', populated by doubles of the townfolk..."

This was in the context of the spelling of Woldercan, so perhaps not enough attention was paid to it. A day or two later, I googled the quote and found out that the Wikipedia summary in question is of the movie, not the book. So I researched the book online for a while and concluded that the mentioned "doubles" were not in the book. I may be wrong about that; I just don't know.

Anyway, I was disappointed because, if there were some sort of analogs of people on Woldercan, that would be a simple solution to the problem James Wynn has raised about what Wolfe could have meant by his remark about Cassie going to Woldercan to find Reis. I doubted that Wolfe would have referenced the movie, rather than the book, upon which it is only loosely based. So I blew it off.

Then I was reminded that Wolfe used references from the Oz movie in FLF, so I may have been wrong to dismiss the possibility of him using the movie version of Dr. Lao as a source in AEG. If there are duplicates of humans on Woldercan, it eliminates the need for hypothetical time travel and other problematic solutions.

What say you?

-Roy

Dave Tallman — 21 Sep 2009, 15:41 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote

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I find that solution very unsatisfying. Even if Woldercan contains duplicates of everyone on Earth (highly problematic -- how could such a wild place support them?) or duplicates of humans who came there (a little better -- it could be the original or an impostor who returns), how could Cassie be sure that the double would love her, or be enough like Bill for her to love?

The movie does have a feature that might be a clue. It's called "The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao" because Tony Randall plays seven parts. This is probably another indication that the main characters play multiple roles.

James Wynn — 21 Sep 2009, 16:01 · in reply to Dave Tallman

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If Wolfe intended this in his reference to the Woldercon of Dr. Lao, then I would presume that he intended it as a place like St. Anne, where being copied by native was a genuine possibility, maybe even a likely one, although probably not a foregone conclusion. If it were a *real* copy then it will love her because the real Reis did--if not immediately then when it learns that Reis loved her. This a lesson to be derived from The Fifth Head of Cerberus and the Whorl Chronicles (Long & Short Sun). If it is the *real* Reis, then the Cassie is relying on the quality of the copy.

Hmmm...in the first chapter of AEG, Chase makes copies of some photographs of Reis, tears up the originals. If this is intended as a metaphor then it does not bode well for the originals of any copies made on Woldercan. Perhaps *none* of the Reis's Cassie meets are real and the Reis she is going to find is not real either.

J.

don doggett — 22 Sep 2009, 04:56 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

--- On Sun, 9/20/09, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:
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I may have been wrong to dismiss the possibility of him using the movie version of Dr. Lao as a source in AEG. If there are duplicates of humans on Woldercan, it eliminates the need for hypothetical time travel and other problematic solutions.

What say you?

I'd say that Wolfe tends to appropriate and redefine any bit of literature and pop culture that appeals to him, and that he is of just the right generation to have been a fan of the movie as well as the book. On the other hand, he does mention Charles Finney (the author of the The Circus of Dr. Lao) by name in AEG, so that tends to skew things towards the book. I own a few copies of it and no, the townsfolk are not duplicated in the novel. It's a wonderful book, Roy, if you haven't read it, and it has influenced many great writers, most notably Ray Bradbury. It definitely belongs in the canon of classic fantastic fiction.

Don

Roy C. Lackey — 22 Sep 2009, 07:13 · in reply to don doggett

"don doggett" wrote:
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Thanks, Don. I has been too many years since I read the book or saw the movie, and I didn't remember Woldercan at all.

-Roy