

TSH: I liked it!

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 24 Mar 2010

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Kieran Mullen — 24 Mar 2010, 19:02

I finished "The Sorcerer's House" last week and I really enjoyed it. First, it has an engaging story that is more transparent than, oh "Peace" or "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" (it's not transparent of course, just *more* transparent). I enjoyed it as a story, even without all the puzzles. Second, the story was one where Wolfe's spare style of "show, don't tell" really shines. The novel is based on a set of letters, and the recorded dialog is pretty brief and there are no long prose descriptions, as one might expect in handwritten letters. It's a book I will enjoy re-reading, trying to suss out who is really who and when.

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The picture of Ted that Doris has looks like the man who stopped Iuean from beating up Baxter (p.134). That man is later identified as the Black, the father of Iuean and Emlyn. However, Doris does not seem to know about faerie. (On occasion I suspected her of knowing more than she ever let on.) I think that Ted and Black are also twins, one magical and the other not (as Black himself states is often the case). "He" is also seen talking to Lupine and vanishing. I don't know if this is Ted or Black. What is the wet thing left behind on Doris's bed with the initials TAG?

I need to re-read the book, for many reasons. One is, how are we to think of Baxter? Is Baxter really "an evil guest?" He needles his brother cruelly, write seductive letters to his brother's wife, and undoubtedly kills him. He is a convicted fraud. How good is he really? I admit I sometimes like my protagonists to be a bit more clear cut - either heroes or anti-heroes. I am not sure what we are supposed to think of Baxter. He does confess his criminal behavior to a number of women. However, a real fraud doesn't hide such things. He tells you about them in such detail that it makes him even more believable. OTOH, I don't fault Baxter as much if he keeps offering a genuine olive branch to George and the latter insists on a duel to the death.

The only clanging false note for me was the rape/assault of Cathy Ruth. Not only did it seem gratuitous, it would have set off a whole slew of consequences that involve the police, hospitals, investigations, etc. These consequences are never played out.

The quest for wisdom/George where Winkle leads Baxter into faerie and a divine voice speaks to Baxter also seems a bit out of place. I think I don't understand it well enough, yet.

I am also intrigued by the "unfinished numen." Emlyn points out that Baxter is in big trouble due to the incorrectly terminated "spell." How is that resolved? Is it simply that he gets more money and more fish? Or does it go deeper than that?

I was trying to figure out how to explain to someone how different Wolfean fantasy is compared

to any other writer. I tried to imagine how Winkle would be handled, say, by Terry Brooks. I could see the facefox pull the whole focus of the book as "cewl." I don't know how to put it into words the difference, how Wolfe lets faerie be "other" without it just becoming a set of DnD character stats.

Anyway, I liked this much more that "An Evil Guest." In AEG the laconic storytelling was frustrating to me and unnatural to the storyline. AEG also jumped about in genres and I *still* don't understand what really happened. The ambiguities in TSH makes more sense as the authors of the various letters have much to hide, and many of them are resolved (to my satisfaction) in the story itself.

Kieran Mullen

Gwern Branwen — 24 Mar 2010, 19:50 · in reply to Kieran Mullen

On Wed, Mar 24, 2010 at 3:02 PM, Kieran Mullen <kieran at nhn.ou.edu> wrote:
"The picture of Ted that Doris has looks like the man who stopped luean from beating up Baxter (p.134). — That man is later identified as the Black, the father of luean and Emlyn. ?However, Doris does not seem to know about faerie. ?(On occasion I suspected her of knowing more than she ever let on.)
? ?I think that Ted and Black are also twins, one magical and the other not (as Black himself states is often the case). — "He" is also seen talking to Lupine and vanishing. — I don't know if this is Ted or Black. ?What is the wet thing left behind on Doris's bed with the initials TAG"

I've not figured that one out either. It's not a body part, and it's apparently square or rectangular, and is likely made out of wood or metal, since paper wouldn't stand being wet and there aren't many usable materials which could have initials stamped on it. I thought that it might be the triannulus, but the shape isn't right. And the initials are a mystery: the T might be for Ted, and the G for Griffin, but A? The character index lists exactly one character who has any name starting with 'A': Ambrosius. As in, the supposed usurper of Goldwurm.

Perhaps Ted pulled a Bax, if you will: shacking up with a mundane wife for a while, and then vamoosing for faerie when he leveled up. At least, this is the best explanation of Ted I have so far, though it still doesn't explain what the object is or why he/his ghost visited Doris.

"I am also intrigued by the "unfinished numen." ? ?Emlyn points out that Baxter is in big trouble due to the incorrectly terminated "spell." ? ?How is that resolved" "Is it simply that he gets more money and more fish" "Or does it go deeper than that"

As I've written earlier, the numen is really frustrating. It's like AEG's time travel or clones - an extremely powerful game-breaking mechanic which apparently is used only for trivial things. The entire novel could be controlled by numen. Or nothing but some fish and the werewolf.

gwern

Thomas Bitterman — 27 Mar 2010, 00:59 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Wed, Mar 24, 2010 at 3:50 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:
On Wed, Mar 24, 2010 at 3:02 PM, Kieran Mullen <kieran at nhn.ou.edu> wrote:

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It's a monogrammed handkerchief. She mentions (in the next paragraph but one) that she was sure Ted was crying. That's why it was wet.