

Lives of the Great Beasts

The Urth list — 32 messages, 11 voices, 02 Jul 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5645>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Jonathan Goodwin — 02 Jul 2010, 18:38

There was some discussion on the list recently, or at least I think there was, about the origins and nature of Abaia, Erebus, and the rest. I've just read the books again recently and had some questions I wanted to ask the list.

The narrative function of the megatherians is quite clear, I think. The literary and mythological antecedents are also reasonably clear. What is not clear to me, however, is just what Wolfe had in mind about their nature, their arrival on Earth, or their motivation (though there's more evidence for this last than the others).

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna (I don't have the exact quote, but I think that's a reasonable approximation.) I suppose they might also have been summoned via catoptromancy, though this seems later in the timeline. If the former, then they must have been smaller and in a different form. I think it might be reasonable to assume that their true nature was not known and it was supposed that, while they may grow large, they would not be monstrously intelligent, ambitious beasts with the desire to rule the planet and the stars from which they came. What would their own world have been like, then? But then it occurred to me that creatures such as this would take on the characteristics of their rulers as they grew. This would fit Wolfe's treatment of alien life forms in other contexts and have some larger thematic significance.

Does that seem plausible?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 02 Jul 2010, 18:58 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 11:38 AM, Jonathan Goodwin <joncgoodwin at gmail.com> wrote:

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna (I don't have the exact quote, but I think that's a reasonable approximation.) I suppose they might also have been summoned via catoptromancy, though this seems later in the timeline. If the former, then they must have been smaller and in a different form. I think it might be reasonable to assume that their true nature was not known and it was supposed that, while they may grow large, they would not be monstrously intelligent, ambitious beasts with the desire to rule the planet and the stars from which they came. What would their own world have been like, then? But then it occurred to me that creatures such as this would take on the characteristics of their rulers as they grew. This would fit Wolfe's treatment of alien life forms in other contexts and have some larger thematic significance.

Does that seem plausible?

Has anyone given any serious consideration to the idea that they are "fallen" Yesodi? Hieresiarchs, as it were?

David Stockhoff — 02 Jul 2010, 19:17 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Nice idea. I always wondered what their motivation was, in taking an interest in Urth among all the planets and races that might be out there.

That would explain their interest in Urth, if as Yesodis they opposed the Yesod project to raise it up. It would be appropriately Satanic.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 11:38 AM, Jonathan Goodwin <joncgoodwin at gmail.com> wrote:

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna (I don't have the exact quote, but I think that's a reasonable approximation.) I suppose they might also have been summoned via catoptromancy, though this seems later in the timeline. If the former, then they must have been smaller and in a different form. I think it might be reasonable to assume that their true nature was not known and it was supposed that, while they may grow large, they would not be monstrously intelligent, ambitious beasts with the desire to rule the planet and the stars from which they came. What would their own world have been like, then? But then it occurred to me that creatures such as this would take on the characteristics of their rulers as they grew. This would fit Wolfe's treatment of alien life forms in other contexts and have some larger thematic significance.

Does that seem plausible?

Has anyone given any serious consideration to the idea that they are "fallen" Yesodi? Hieresiarchs, as it were?

Jeff Wilson — 02 Jul 2010, 19:41 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

On 7/2/2010 1:38 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

There was some discussion on the list recently, or at least I think there was, about the origins and nature of Abaia, Erebus, and the rest. I've just read the books again recently and had some questions I wanted to ask the list.

The narrative function of the megatherians is quite clear, I think. The literary and mythological antecedents are also reasonably clear. What is not clear to me, however, is just what Wolfe had in mind about their nature, their arrival on Earth, or their motivation (though there's more evidence for this last than the others).

I don't think these are the same megatherians as the eponymous seventeen black magicians. Though some of the seventeen were doubtlessly in league with the mountain-sized crew, and I'd have to guess that they symbolize opportunist forces who bodily intrude where camel's nose, mortal sig, went before.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Jonathan Goodwin — 02 Jul 2010, 19:51 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 2:41 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
I don't think these are the same megatherians as the eponymous seventeen black magicians. Though some of the seventeen were doubtlessly in league with the mountain-sized crew, and I'd have to guess that they symbolize opportunist forces who bodily intrude where camel's nose, mortal sig, went before.

Could you explain in more detail what you mean? This doesn't make any sense to me at all.

Lee Berman — 02 Jul 2010, 20:05 · follows Jonathan Goodwin

What is not clear to me, however, is just what Wolfe had in mind about their nature, their arrival on Earth, or their motivation.

I think Wolfe cannot be too specific in regard to this as being too explicit would negate a necessary mythological essence of their nature.

But I think we can piece together a nice Megatherian back story using the Navisaput tale, Juturna, Typhon, Baldanders as an aspiring Megatherian and Jonas' tale of the star-spawned black beans (always considering the autobiographical component- Wolfe claims to have been grown from a bean by Damon Knight on an evening in June, 1966).

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna.

I don't remember this. Is it in reference to megatherians? My vague memory is that might refer to creatures like the alzado; but that could surely be faulty.

Has anyone given any serious consideration to the idea that they are "fallen" Yesodi? Hieresiarchs, as it were?

Sure, a higher level universe (heaven) would seem a likely starting point for fallen angels. I sometimes wonder if some of the horrors found in Briah originate from the lower level hellish universe (Abaddon).

I always wondered what their motivation was, in taking an interest in Urth among all the planets and races that might be out there.

My impression is that The Short Sun books suggest many planets could be home to giant, star-crossing, controlling, manipulative creatures. Motivation becomes one of definition. Species which have no interest in controlling others (like The Neighbors) do not devote the time and energy needed to travel and conquer among the stars. They find equilibrium at home.

Jerry Friedman — 02 Jul 2010, 20:36 · in reply to Lee Berman

So is there a consensus on what the seventeen megatherians are?

1) What I thought when I first noticed that title was that they were big animals, possibly with "ther(e)" in their names: arsinoither, baluchither, megathere, etc. The book would be their "life histories": how they are born, grow, eat at different stages, interact with each other and with other organisms, reproduce. It's just a coincidence that their number is the same as the Group of Seventeen.

2) They're seventeen famous evil people from history. Cf. Borges's /Universal History of Infamy/. Again the repetition of seventeen is just a coincidence.

3) They're Erebus, Abaia, etc. The name and the allusion to Revelation (and Aleister Crowley?) would be appropriate. The matching with the Group of Seventeen would not be a

coincidence--we could speculate that each one "operates" one of the Group, or some such. (I think somebody said that in the past month or two, maybe Lee Berman?) It's hard to imagine what a book about their lives would contain, though.

4) They're the original Group of Seventeen, who were probably revolutionaries and evil enough (at least in Commonwealth propaganda) to justify being called great beasts.

5) They're a particularly beastly Group of Seventeen from some point in history.

6) They're something else.

If anyone is thinking of consulting /Lexicon Urthus/, Michael Andre-Driussi is total noncommittal on this one.

Jerry Friedman

Jeff Wilson — 02 Jul 2010, 20:47 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 7/2/2010 2:41 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 7/2/2010 1:38 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

There was some discussion on the list recently, or at least I think there was, about the origins and nature of Abaia, Erebus, and the rest. I've just read the books again recently and had some questions I wanted to ask the list.

The narrative function of the megatherians is quite clear, I think. The literary and mythological antecedents are also reasonably clear. What is not clear to me, however, is just what Wolfe had in mind about their nature, their arrival on Earth, or their motivation (though there's more evidence for this last than the others).

I don't think these are the same megatherians as the eponymous seventeen black magicians. Though some of the seventeen were doubtlessly in league with the mountain-sized crew, and I'd have to guess that they symbolize opportunist forces who bodily intrude where camel's nose, mortal sig, went before.

or even "mortal sin"

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Lane Haygood — 02 Jul 2010, 20:59 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 2:17 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

Nice idea. I always wondered what their motivation was, in taking an interest in Urth among all the planets and races that might be out there.

Why do they need special motivation to be interested in earth, if they are but one of many interstellar/cosmic beasts? What if Erebus or Abaia are on Urth by some accident instead of design, and they merely seek to dominate and enslave whatever they happen to find in their path?

Or why set such paltry spatial limits on them in the first place? Maybe they exist on and are conscious of many worlds simultaneously.

Let's not go artificially limiting our cosmic horrors with human failings.

LH

Jonathan Goodwin — 02 Jul 2010, 21:14 · in reply to Lane Haygood

The passage that, when I typed the original message, I was sure referred specifically to Erebus, Abaia, etc., was not, it seems, said by Jonas. I have a strong memory of someone saying it, whether Baldanders, Dr. Talos, or someone else; but it's possible that I conflated it with a description of the alzano, etc., which someone raised as a possibility earlier. I was almost sure that the word "fauna" is in the passage I remember. The latter two books are searchable on google books, but the first two, it seems, are not.

I like the explanation I had, though. I imagined Erebus, Abaia, etc., as being something like protoplasms--pseudopodian animalcules emitted by some Solaris-type planet, which the Urthian xenobiologists drastically mistake the nature of. I've also always found it curious that Typhon is dismissive of them, which would fit with the idea that they grew to emulate him and haven't yet achieved his power. (Typhon sent his children/subjects among the stars; Abaia grows his to swim between them, etc.)

And then there's the idea that some earlier cycle of humans created the hierogrammates, and the megatherians would be the dark mirror, etc.

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 3:59 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 2:17 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

Nice idea. I always wondered what their motivation was, in taking an interest in Urth among all the planets and races that might be out there.

Why do they need special motivation to be interested in earth, if they are but one of many interstellar/cosmic beasts? "What if Erebus or Abaia are on Urth by some accident instead of design, and they merely seek to dominate and enslave whatever they happen to find in their path"

Or why set such paltry spatial limits on them in the first place?
Maybe they exist on and are conscious of many worlds simultaneously.

Let's not go artificially limiting our cosmic horrors with human failings.

LH

David Stockhoff — 02 Jul 2010, 21:15 · in reply to Lane Haygood

I didn't mention "special" motivation. For all I know they're bored.

In which case, still---why Urth?

Lane Haygood wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 2:17 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

Nice idea. I always wondered what their motivation was, in taking an interest in Urth among all the planets and races that might be out there.

Why do they need special motivation to be interested in earth, if they are but one of many interstellar/cosmic beasts? What if Erebus or Abaia are on Urth by some accident instead of design, and they merely seek to dominate and enslave whatever they happen to find in their path?

Or why set such paltry spatial limits on them in the first place?
Maybe they exist on and are conscious of many worlds simultaneously.

Let's not go artificially limiting our cosmic horrors with human failings.

LH

David Stockhoff — 02 Jul 2010, 21:16 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

I tend to think of them as Lovecraftian horrors. But I like this too: fallen hierogrammates?

Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

The passage that, when I typed the original message, I was sure referred specifically to Erebus, Abaia, etc., was not, it seems, said by Jonas. I have a strong memory of someone saying it, whether Baldanders, Dr. Talos, or someone else; but it's possible that I conflated it with a description of the alzabo, etc., which someone raised as a possibility earlier. I was almost sure that the word "fauna" is in the passage I remember. The latter two books are searchable on google books, but the first two, it seems, are not.

I like the explanation I had, though. I imagined Erebus, Abaia, etc., as being something like protoplasms--pseudopodian animalcules emitted by some Solaris-type planet, which the Urthian xenobiologists drastically mistake the nature of. I've also always found it curious that Typhon is dismissive of them, which would fit with the idea that they grew to emulate him and haven't yet achieved his power. (Typhon sent his children/subjects among the stars; Abaia grows his to swim between them, etc.)

And then there's the idea that some earlier cycle of humans created the hierogrammates, and the megatherians would be the dark mirror, etc.

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 3:59 PM, Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com> wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 2:17 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

Nice idea. I always wondered what their motivation was, in taking an interest in Urth among all the planets and races that might be out there.

Why do they need special motivation to be interested in earth, if they are but one of many interstellar/cosmic beasts? What if Erebus or Abaia are on Urth by some accident instead of design, and they merely seek to dominate and enslave whatever they happen to find in their path?

Or why set such paltry spatial limits on them in the first place? Maybe they exist on and are conscious of many worlds simultaneously.

Let's not go artificially limiting our cosmic horrors with human failings.

LH

Jeff Wilson — 02 Jul 2010, 21:31 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

On 7/2/2010 2:51 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 2:41 PM, Jeff Wilson<jwilson at io.com> wrote:

I don't think these are the same megatherians as the eponymous seventeen black magicians. Though some of the seventeen were doubtlessly in league with the mountain-sized crew, and I'd have to guess that they symbolize opportunist forces who bodily intrude where camel's nose, mortal sig, went before.

Could you explain in more detail what you mean? This doesn't make any sense to me at all.

Aleister Crowley, a notorious occult figure, called himself or at least identified with among many other labels, The Great Beast. Megatherian means "great beast." At the time of BoTNS' writing "satanic panic" was coming into popularity, especially with other occult figures like Anton Lavey openly operating satanic churches and even merchandising with book deals like The Satanic Bible. Obviously these sorts of people live fabulously lurid, biography worthy lives, and just as there have been any number in centuries past like Cagliostro, surely any number more will continue to come over the chiliads.

The connection with the alien powers is an inversion of the sanctifactory true service to a false god transforming one into a defacto servant of the true god; a selfish, unpowered conman or gifted person who prostitutes their gift for personal gain and notoriety are thus corrupting themselves into ready tools for deception and malice in the service to the alien unworthy cause greater than themselves, while even believing they are doing good toward this "higher" purpose.

Juturna might be an example of such a person.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Jonathan Goodwin — 02 Jul 2010, 22:05 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

As I understand it, Crowley added "mega" to the word "therion," which does not appear with that modifier in the Apocalypse, to describe himself. I find it dubious that Wolfe would rely on a term used by an idiosyncratic megalomaniac, when the more literal description fits the text so much more clearly.

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 4:31 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

On 7/2/2010 2:51 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 2:41 PM, Jeff Wilson<jwilson at io.com> "wrote:

I don't think these are the same megatherians as the eponymous seventeen black magicians. Though some of the seventeen were doubtlessly in league with the mountain-sized crew, and I'd have to guess that they symbolize opportunist forces who bodily intrude where camel's nose, mortal sig, went before.

Could you explain in more detail what you mean" This doesn't make any sense to me at all.

Aleister Crowley, a notorious occult figure, called himself or at least identified with among many other labels, The Great Beast. Megatherian means "great beast." ?At the time of BoTNS' writing "satanic panic" was coming into popularity, especially with other occult figures like Anton Lavey openly operating satanic churches and even merchandising with book deals like The Satanic Bible. Obviously these sorts of people live fabulously lurid, biography worthy lives, and just as there have been any number in centuries past like Cagliostro, surely any number more will continue to come over the chiliads.

The connection with the alien powers is an inversion of the sanctifactory true service to a false god transforming one into a defacto servant of the true god; a selfish, unpowered conman or gifted person who prostitutes their gift for personal gain and notoriety are thus corrupting themselves into ready tools for deception and malice in the service to the alien unworthy cause greater than themselves, while even believing they are doing good toward this "higher" purpose.

Juturna might be an example of such a person.

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Nicholas Jost — 02 Jul 2010, 22:24 · follows Jonathan Goodwin

Abaia grows his to swim
between them, etc.)

I almost forget that Severius "swims" back from the hole to the ship...

Nicholas Jost

Jeff Wilson — 03 Jul 2010, 02:29 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

On 7/2/2010 5:05 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:
As I understand it, Crowley added "mega" to the word "therion," which does not appear with that modifier in the Apocalypse, to describe himself. I find it dubious that Wolfe would rely on a term used by an idiosyncratic megalomaniac, when the more literal description fits the text so much more clearly.

I'm not sure what you mean. "Megatherians" is in the text. If "megatherion" is somehow tainted, why wouldn't he use something less similar? It equally skims close "Megatherium", the name for the prehistoric giant sloth of the region, and whose latter-day counterpart appears in the Well of Orchids. Sloth biographies?

Or it could refer these, equally colorful fellows:

<http://www.150.si.edu/chap3/club.htm>

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Jonathan Goodwin — 03 Jul 2010, 03:24 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

"Megatherian" is not Wolfe's coinage. It's in the OED. It is a simple variant of the same word used to describe the extinct sloths, used in the same way: "great beast."

What does "megatherian" mean in the New Sun? It refers to the great beasts Abaia, Erebus, Scylla, Arioch, et al. (If they are the size of mountains, what bioengineered animal would warrant "mega-?") There are sorcerers on Urth, and perhaps their power does come from the

megatherians. I doubt that the mentioned book is a parallel to Godwin's *Lives of the Necromancers*, however. To think it so would require making a specific inference from Crowley's silliness, and I see no reason to do that.

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 9:29 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

On 7/2/2010 5:05 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

As I understand it, Crowley added "mega" to the word "therion," which does not appear with that modifier in the *Apocalypse*, to describe himself. I find it dubious that Wolfe would rely on a term used by an idiosyncratic megalomaniac, when the more literal description fits the text so much more clearly.

I'm not sure what you mean. "Megatherians" is in the text. If "megatherion" is somehow tainted, why wouldn't he use something less similar? It equally skims close "Megatherium", the name for the prehistoric giant sloth of the region, and whose latter-day counterpart appears in the *Well of Orchids*. Sloth biographies?

Or it could refer these, equally colorful fellows:

<http://www.150.si.edu/chap3/club.htm>

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Jeff Wilson — 03 Jul 2010, 05:23 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

On 7/2/2010 10:24 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

"Megatherian" is not Wolfe's coinage. It's in the OED. It is a simple variant of the same word used to describe the extinct sloths, used in the same way: "great beast."

What does "megatherian" mean in the *New Sun*? It refers to the great beasts Abaia, Erebus, Scylla, Arioch, et al. (If they are the size of mountains, what bioengineered animal would warrant "mega-") There are sorcerers on Urth, and perhaps their power does come from the megatherians. I doubt that the mentioned book is a parallel to Godwin's *Lives of the Necromancers*, however. To think it so would require making a specific inference from Crowley's silliness, and I see no reason to do that.

I still don't see it as necessarily hinging on Crowley's anything.

How do you address the "lives" portion? Like this?

http://www.neilgaiman.com/p/Cool_Stuff/Short_Stories/I_Cthulhu

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

David Stockhoff — 03 Jul 2010, 11:57 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

Why couldn't it be a joke?

Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

"Megatherian" is not Wolfe's coinage. It's in the OED. It is a simple

variant of the same word used to describe the extinct sloths, used in the same way: "great beast."

What does "megatherian" mean in the New Sun? It refers to the great beasts Abaia, Erebus, Scylla, Arioch, et al. (If they are the size of mountains, what bioengineered animal would warrant "mega-")? There are sorcerers on Urth, and perhaps their power does come from the megatherians. I doubt that the mentioned book is a parallel to Godwin's Lives of the Necromancers, however. To think it so would require making a specific inference from Crowley's silliness, and I see no reason to do that.

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 9:29 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

On 7/2/2010 5:05 PM, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

As I understand it, Crowley added "mega" to the word "therion," which does not appear with that modifier in the Apocalypse, to describe himself. I find it dubious that Wolfe would rely on a term used by an idiosyncratic megalomaniac, when the more literal description fits the text so much more clearly.

I'm not sure what you mean. "Megatherians" is in the text. If "megatherion" is somehow tainted, why wouldn't he use something less similar? It equally skims close "Megatherium", the name for the prehistoric giant sloth of the region, and whose latter-day counterpart appears in the Well of Orchids. Sloth biographies?

Or it could refer these, equally colorful fellows:

<http://www.150.si.edu/chap3/club.htm>

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Jonathan Goodwin — 03 Jul 2010, 16:53 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 12:23 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
I still don't see it as necessarily hinging on Crowley's anything.

It's possible that I don't understand what you're arguing, then. I thought it went something like this: Crowley was a magician. Crowley called himself the "megatherion," his own coinage for the Beast of Revelation. There are magicians in BoTNS.* Therefore, the Lives of the Seventeen Megatherians likely refers to similar self-styled "great beasts" who were magicians rather than to the powers in the sea.

This argument, if I've reproduced it correctly, goes wrong by overestimating the likely relevance of the first two steps, or, perhaps, by assuming a broader context for the second step than it in fact has.

If you're also suggesting, as I think you might be, that a title modeled on Plutarch or Vasari would be inappropriate for still-living beasts and would be better applied to their vassals, perhaps the Group of Seventeen, who might well be thought of as magicians, that's one thing. I don't see why they would die, either, though. The title would be appropriate if they change while growing as much as I had earlier assumed, though.

*Probably not really, though. Severian's suggestible, and it's directly stated that the Ascians and others are controlled by thoughts. Typhon's oath seems to be an incipient bit of mind-control in the same way that the duel with the magician is, or at least Severian perceives it that way; but it's difficult to ascribe this to magic or even charisma.

David Stockhoff — 03 Jul 2010, 17:38 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

Or, the argument could be purely literary. Anybody NOT heard of the "Lives of the Saints"?

It's not much of a stretch to combine that with an interesting coinage for the Beast of Revelation, whatever the source, in a novel about the destruction of the world.

Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 12:23 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

I still don't see it as necessarily hinging on Crowley's anything.

It's possible that I don't understand what you're arguing, then. I thought it went something like this: Crowley was a magician. Crowley called himself the "megatherion," his own coinage for the Beast of Revelation. There are magicians in BoTNS.* Therefore, the Lives of the Seventeen Megatherians likely refers to similar self-styled "great beasts" who were magicians rather than to the powers in the sea.

This argument, if I've reproduced it correctly, goes wrong by overestimating the likely relevance of the first two steps, or, perhaps, by assuming a broader context for the second step than it in fact has.

If you're also suggesting, as I think you might be, that a title modeled on Plutarch or Vasari would be inappropriate for still-living beasts and would be better applied to their vassals, perhaps the Group of Seventeen, who might well be thought of as magicians, that's one thing. I don't see why they would die, either, though. The title would be appropriate if they change while growing as much as I had earlier assumed, though.

*Probably not really, though. Severian's suggestible, and it's directly stated that the Ascians and others are controlled by thoughts. Typhon's oath seems to be an incipient bit of mind-control in the same way that the duel with the magician is, or at least Severian perceives it that way; but it's difficult to ascribe this to magic or even charisma.

Gerry Quinn — 03 Jul 2010, 17:59 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

From: "Jonathan Goodwin" <joncgoodwin at gmail.com>

If you're also suggesting, as I think you might be, that a title modeled on Plutarch or Vasari would be inappropriate for still-living beasts and would be better applied to their vassals, perhaps the Group of Seventeen, who might well be thought of as magicians, that's one thing. I don't see why they would die, either, though. The title would be appropriate if they change while growing as much as I had earlier assumed, though.

'Group of Severnteen' seems more like the self=selected name of a communist cadre to me.

- Gerry Quinn

Jonathan Goodwin — 03 Jul 2010, 18:26 · in reply to David Stockhoff

It is too much a stretch. If Crowley had called himself "megarutabaga," and Wolfe reproduced it, then yes. But "megatherian" fits with the book's linguistic pattern (use of extinct animal names) and context (actual great beasts, significant plot drivers) too clearly to reach back for a dubious allusion this way.

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 12:38 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
Or, the argument could be purely literary. Anybody NOT heard of the "Lives of the Saints"?

It's not much of a stretch to combine that with an interesting coinage for the Beast of Revelation, whatever the source, in a novel about the destruction of the world.

Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 12:23 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

I still don't see it as necessarily hinging on Crowley's anything.

It's possible that I don't understand what you're arguing, then. I thought it went something like this: Crowley was a magician. Crowley called himself the "megatherion," his own coinage for the Beast of Revelation. There are magicians in BoTNS.* Therefore, the Lives of the Seventeen Megatherians likely refers to similar self-styled "great beasts" who were magicians rather than to the powers in the sea.

This argument, if I've reproduced it correctly, goes wrong by overestimating the likely relevance of the first two steps, or, perhaps, by assuming a broader context for the second step than it in fact has.

If you're also suggesting, as I think you might be, that a title modeled on Plutarch or Vasari would be inappropriate for still-living beasts and would be better applied to their vassals, perhaps the Group of Seventeen, who might well be thought of as magicians, that's one thing. I don't see why they would die, either, though. The title would be appropriate if they change while growing as much as I had earlier assumed, though.

*Probably not really, though. Severian's suggestible, and it's directly stated that the Ascians and others are controlled by thoughts. Typhon's oath seems to be an incipient bit of mind-control in the same way that the duel with the magician is, or at least Severian perceives it that way; but it's difficult to ascribe this to magic or even charisma.

David Stockhoff — 03 Jul 2010, 18:57 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

I don't understand. You're right about "megatherian" and the linguistic pattern it fits. But what's your point otherwise?

Do you think Wolfe didn't know someone had come up with a similar term for the Great Beast?

It's possible, but who really cares---at very least, they were doing the same thing. If he did know---and the man knows more than I do---it doesn't mean Wolfe imitated Crowley: it just means that words have resonance.

Is it possible to say "The Lives of the Daemons" and not invoke "The Lives of the Saints"? The thing about the linguistic pattern you note is that it depends on those very resonances.

All books are made of other books.

Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

It is too much a stretch. If Crowley had called himself "megarutabaga," and Wolfe reproduced it, then yes. But "megatherian" fits with the book's linguistic pattern (use of extinct animal names) and context (actual great beasts, significant plot drivers) too clearly to reach back for a dubious allusion this way.

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 12:38 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

Or, the argument could be purely literary. Anybody NOT heard of the "Lives of the Saints"?

It's not much of a stretch to combine that with an interesting coinage for the Beast of Revelation, whatever the source, in a novel about the destruction of the world.

Jonathan Goodwin wrote:

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 12:23 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

I still don't see it as necessarily hinging on Crowley's anything.

It's possible that I don't understand what you're arguing, then. I thought it went something like this: Crowley was a magician. Crowley called himself the "megatherion," his own coinage for the Beast of Revelation. There are magicians in BoTNS.* Therefore, the Lives of the Seventeen Megatherians likely refers to similar self-styled "great beasts" who were magicians rather than to the powers in the sea.

This argument, if I've reproduced it correctly, goes wrong by overestimating the likely relevance of the first two steps, or, perhaps, by assuming a broader context for the second step than it in fact has.

If you're also suggesting, as I think you might be, that a title modeled on Plutarch or Vasari would be inappropriate for still-living beasts and would be better applied to their vassals, perhaps the Group of Seventeen, who might well be thought of as magicians, that's one thing. I don't see why they would die, either, though. The title would be appropriate if they change while growing as much as I had earlier assumed, though.

*Probably not really, though. Severian's suggestible, and it's directly stated that the Ascians and others are controlled by thoughts. Typhon's oath seems to be an incipient bit of mind-control in the same way that the duel with the magician is, or at least Severian perceives it that way; but it's difficult to ascribe this to

magic or even charisma.

Gerry Quinn — 03 Jul 2010, 19:51 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna.

I don't remember this. Is it in reference to megatherians? My vague memory is that might refer to creatures like the alzabo; but that could surely be faulty.

I don't think so either. The alzabo was brought to Urth "as many other things, for the use and benefit of Man" [quoting from memory]. All I know of the undersea monsters, if they are indeed the Megatherians, of which I am not certain, is the story of the beans.

I assume this beans story to have some basis in truth, but it may be historically twisted or even metaphorical. Hmm... could Erebus/Abaia be some kind of feminist revenge on the race of Men, as the story might suggest? Their only acolytes we meet are female, and we are not really told the gender of the giant monsters, even if we tend to assume them male. [Nor are any serious hints given about their sexual proclivities, but after the Wizard Knight, I am inclined to feel that this may be for the best.]

- Gerry Quinn

Jonathan Goodwin — 03 Jul 2010, 20:25 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Why does the woman with the black beans story refer to the monsters under the sea? Because she wished to be obeyed, and they wish to be obeyed? Was she one, and divided by such as Typhon (who, remember, does not fear them), and now is many? Were the beans the seeds from which the monsters grew? (I've always assumed that the black beans were a metaphor for the black hole devouring the sun.)

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 2:51 PM, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna.

I don't remember this. Is it in reference to megatherians? My vague memory is that might refer to creatures like the alzabo; but that could surely be faulty.

I don't think so either. "The alzabo was brought to Urth "as many other things, for the use and benefit of Man" [quoting from memory]. All I know of the undersea monsters, if they are indeed the Megatherians, of which I am not certain, is the story of the beans.

I assume this beans story to have some basis in truth, but it may be historically twisted or even metaphorical. ?Hmm... could Erebus/Abaia be some kind of feminist revenge on the race of Men, as the story might suggest" ?Their only acolytes we meet are female, and we are not really told the gender of the giant monsters, even if we tend to assume them male. ?[Nor are any serious hints given about their sexual proclivities, but after the Wizard Knight, I am inclined to feel that this may be for the best.]

- Gerry Quinn

Jack Smith — 03 Jul 2010, 23:31 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

When I first read *Shadow*, it seemed obvious to me that Jonas's tale of the beans referred to the origins of Abaia and the other monsters in the sea:

"she displayed the beans to the lords of men, and told them that unless she were obeyed she would cast them into the sea and so put an end to the world." (Shadow, ch. XXXV)

However, others readers don't see this and so it must not be so obvious.

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 3:51 PM, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna.

I don't remember this. Is it in reference to megatherians? My vague memory is that might refer to creatures like the alzado; but that could surely be faulty.

I don't think so either. The alzado was brought to Urth "as many other things, for the use and benefit of Man" [quoting from memory]. All I know of the undersea monsters, if they are indeed the Megatherians, of which I am not certain, is the story of the beans.

I assume this beans story to have some basis in truth, but it may be historically twisted or even metaphorical. Hmm... could Erebus/Abia be some kind of feminist revenge on the race of Men, as the story might suggest? Their only acolytes we meet are female, and we are not really told the gender of the giant monsters, even if we tend to assume them male. [Nor are any serious hints given about their sexual proclivities, but after the Wizard Knight, I am inclined to feel that this may be for the best.]

- Gerry Quinn

Milton Jackson — 04 Jul 2010, 00:23 · in reply to Jack Smith

I've always wondered. Do you guys think Erebus and Abia actually exist, or are they perhaps some kind of boogymen like the Green Knight dreamed up to instill fear in the land dwellers? They never actually come into the story, and the logistics of something of their size existing on Earth are rather hard to grasp. Even living entirely in water, they would be subject to the laws of gravity as we know them. Gravity on Earth would greatly restrict their movements and cause the blood pressure needed to keep all their cells nourished with necessary oxygen to be astronomical. For these reasons, I've always wondered if Wolfe ever intended them to be legitimate characters in the story at all.

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 7:31 PM, Jack Smith <jack.smith.1946 at gmail.com> wrote:
When I first read *Shadow*, it seemed obvious to me that Jonas's tale of the beans referred to the origins of Abia and the other monsters in the sea: "she displayed the beans to the lords of men, and told them that unless she were obeyed she would cast them into the sea and so put an end to

the world." (Shadow, ch. XXXV)

However, others readers don't see this and so it must not be so obvious.

On Sat, Jul 3, 2010 at 3:51 PM, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Jonas tells Severian that they were brought to Earth, possibly in the zoetic tower, to replace the extinct fauna.

I don't remember this. Is it in reference to megatherians? My vague memory is that might refer to creatures like the alzado; but that could surely be faulty.

I don't think so either. The alzado was brought to Urth "as many other things, for the use and benefit of Man" [quoting from memory]. All I know of the undersea monsters, if they are indeed the Megatherians, of which I am not certain, is the story of the beans.

I assume this beans story to have some basis in truth, but it may be historically twisted or even metaphorical. Hmm... could Erebus/Abaia be some kind of feminist revenge on the race of Men, as the story might suggest? Their only acolytes we meet are female, and we are not really told the gender of the giant monsters, even if we tend to assume them male. [Nor are any serious hints given about their sexual proclivities, but after the Wizard Knight, I am inclined to feel that this may be for the best.]

- Gerry Quinn

Lee Berman — 04 Jul 2010, 03:36 · follows Milton Jackson

Well, we could try to count the mentioned Great Beasts, see if they add up to 17. Abaia, Erebus, Arioch, Scylla, Ouroboros, Kraken,... can we come up with 11 more? Not without debate, I'm sure.

I've always wondered. Do you guys think Erebus and Abaia actually exist, or are they perhaps some kind of boogeymen..

I think they exist. There is the deep voice coming up from Gyoll beneath the ship. There is the underground giant something that scares the man-apes of the cave. Moreover, The Mother, living beneath Blue's ocean, would seem to be a more specifically described version of such great monstrosities.

'Group of Seventeen' seems more like the self-selected name of a communist cadre to me.

I agree but why can't they be both? We are given such graphic views of Tzadkiel changing shape and pinching off smaller versions of him/herself in UotNS. I don't think it is unreasonable to guess that Wolfe included these graphic views to help explain to us what might have been going on back on Urth in the previous 4 books among the fallen versions of Tzadkiel.

The Communists, in their heyday, were supposed to be godless atheists but I think many would agree they were forced to invent their own false gods for their people to worship. Book of the New Sun is a Cold War-written story and shining light on the false gods of communism could have been a part of Wolfe's intention.

Gerry Quinn — 04 Jul 2010, 09:33 · in reply to Milton Jackson

From: Milton Jackson

I've always wondered. Do you guys think Erebus and Abaia actually exist, or are they perhaps some kind of boogeymen like the Green Knight dreamed up to instill fear in the land dwellers? They never actually come into the story, and the logistics of something of their size existing on Earth are rather hard to grasp. Even living entirely in water, they would be subject to the laws of gravity as we know them. Gravity on Earth would greatly restrict their movements and cause the blood pressure needed to keep all their cells nourished with necessary oxygen

to be astronomical. For these reasons, I've always wondered if Wolfe ever intended them to be legitimate characters in the story at all.

I don't see any real reason to disbelieve it. Typhon confirms their existence, as someone else does (the Autarch or Jonas, I'm not sure which) and one of them seems to control Ascia. Baldanders is an aspiring sea giant, and Juturna exists too. Perhaps Erebus and Abaia are not truly as large as mountains, but there are certainly large intelligent creatures in the sea.

- Gerry Quinn

.

Milton Jackson — 04 Jul 2010, 13:50 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Oh, i completely agree about the existence of large intelligent creatures under the sea. baldanders and Juturna confirm that just by their existence. (As an aside, I like the fact that Wolfe acknowledged a human the size of a sauropod dinosaur or a whale could only exist in the water.) Anyway, wondering if Erebus and Abai actually exist was just idl speculation on my part. Other characters do confirm their existennce, but the fact that Wolfe never brings even the shadow of one into the story and describes them as being of a size that, under the stresses of Earth's gravity, would be problematic (thoguh as you note, this could be a hyperbolic description) at best has caused me to speculate if they might not be some kind of Wizard of Oz-style distractions. You're right though. Wolfe probably intends Erebus and Abaia to actually exist in the story.

On Sun, Jul 4, 2010 at 5:33 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

From: Milton Jackson <miltonwjackson at gmail.com>

>I've always wondered. Do you guys think Erebus and Abaia actually exist, or are they perhaps some kind of boogeymen like the Green Knight dreamed up to instill fear in the land dwellers? They never actually come into the story, and the logistics of something of their size existing on Earth are rather hard to grasp. Even living entirely in water, they would be subject to the laws of gravity as we know them. Gravity on Earth would greatly restrict their movements and cause the blood pressure needed to keep all their cells nourished with necessary oxygen
>to be astronomical. For these reasons, I've always wondered if Wolfe ever intended them to be legitimate characters in the story at all.

I don't see any real reason to disbelieve it. Typhon confirms their existence, as someone else does (the Autarch or Jonas, I'm not sure which) and one of them seems to control Ascia. Baldanders is an aspiring

sea giant, and Juturna exists too. Perhaps Erebus and Abaia are not truly as large as mountains, but there are certainly large intelligent creatures in the sea.

- Gerry Quinn

.

David Stockhoff — 04 Jul 2010, 13:57 · in reply to Milton Jackson

They certainly do have the effects and functions of real characters. But I was serious when I said I think of them as Lovecraftian horrors. They lurk beyond the edge of the stage, formless and horrible. To give them precise form would be to render them ordinary.

Milton Jackson wrote:

Oh, i completely agree about the existence of large intelligent creatures under the sea. baldanders and Juturna confirm that just by their existence. (As an aside, I like the fact that Wolfe acknowledged a human the size of a sauropod dinosaur or a whale could only exist in the water.) Anyway, wondering if Erebus and Abai actually exist was just idl speculation on my part. Other characters do confirm their existennce, but the fact that Wolfe never brings even the shadow of one into the story and describes them as being of a size that, under the stresses of Earth's gravity, would be problematic (thoguh as you note, this could be a hyperbolic description) at best has caused me to speculate if they might not be some kind of Wizard of Oz-style distractions. You're right though. Wolfe probably intends Erebus and Abaia to actually exist in the story.

On Sun, Jul 4, 2010 at 5:33 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie <mailto:gerryq at indigo.ie>> wrote:

From: Milton Jackson <mailto:miltonwjackson at gmail.com>
>I've always wondered. Do you guys think Erebus and Abaia actually exist, or are they perhaps some kind of boogeymen like the Green Knight dreamed up to instill fear in the land dwellers? They never actually come into the story, and the logistics of something of their size existing on Earth are rather hard to grasp. Even living entirely in water, they would be subject to the laws of gravity as we know them. Gravity on Earth would greatly restrict their movements and cause the blood pressure needed to keep all their cells nourished with necessary oxygen to be astronomical. For these reasons, I've always wondered if Wolfe ever intended them to be legitimate characters in the story at all.

I don't see any real reason to disbelieve it. Typhon confirms their existence, as someone else does (the Autarch or Jonas, I'm not sure which) and one of them seems to control Ascia. Baldanders is an aspiring sea giant, and Juturna exists too. Perhaps Erebus and Abaia are not truly as large as mountains, but there are certainly large intelligent creatures in the sea.

- Gerry Quinn

.
