

# The Lochage's Rant...

The Urth list — 8 messages, 7 voices, 31 Aug 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5732>

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Ryan Dunn — 31 Aug 2010, 02:31

Hello All,

I have had a hard time with a passage from Shadow... the rant the lochage gives to Severian in the bartizan. He is telling Severian how vast Nessus is, how all attempts to count them have failed, and so forth.

But he describes the city in this passage, as follows:

"The city grows and changes every night, like writing chalked on a wall. Houses are built in the streets by clever people who take up the cobbles in the dark and claim the ground - did you know that?"

I think I understand the second part. I'm not sure what taking up the cobbles in the dark means exactly, but this has something to do with clever people claiming land as their own by stealing it in the dark? Anyhow...

More importantly, what does he mean by the city changing every night? And how is writing chalked on a wall the right metaphor here. Is he saying there are so many people, that every day a line of buildings might appear, while another might crumble?

If anybody can help here, I would appreciate it.

Thank You,

...ryan

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Gwern Branwen — 31 Aug 2010, 04:28 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

On Mon, Aug 30, 2010 at 10:31 PM, Ryan Dunn <[ryan at liftingfaces.com](mailto:ryan@liftingfaces.com)> wrote:  
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He's referring to the practice of extending houses out into the street (just plop your timbers on top of the cobblestones, or remove the stones first, and build upwards), or just brazenly building an entire house in the street. Once the building is \*there\*, who's going to object? He's being pretty literal there.

gwern

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Jeff Wilson — 31 Aug 2010, 04:46 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

On 8/30/2010 9:31 PM, Ryan Dunn wrote:  
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If you google on "cobblestone street" you can see lots of streets, sidewalks, and plazas paved with a variety of cobblesstones from natural found rocks to shaped and polished stones to bricks, closely or loosely tessellated to form a durable, weather-proof surface for foot and vehicular traffic in these public areas.

"Clever people" can arrange for a party to clear an area of these stones and put up a quick-and-dirty shed in the place so that by the light of the next day, it looks like the place was never paved to start with and has been a private home all along. The cobbles are also worth money if they can be hauled to where new development is taking place.

More importantly, what does he mean by the city changing every night? And how is writing chalked on a wall the right metaphor here. Is he saying there are so many people, that every day a line of buildings might appear, while another might crumble?

With multiple hand-made buildings per person, there are always opportunities to tear down here and reassemble there. I imagine it yields something like the the Brazilian favelas:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Favela>

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com  
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana  
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

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David Stockhoff — 31 Aug 2010, 11:53 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

The favelas were my first thought as well. Nessus is a bona fide megacity, with a core (or two) and vast slums.

These slums border on wasteland---the only difference between Nessus and our megacities is that ours are growing. Nessus dies every day as it moves north, although so slowly you can't see it. It's hidden.

I'm also a little mystified by the need for this description. But it seems like a kind of circle-of-life

metaphor. Nessus is both alive and dying. And since to some degree it stands in for the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth stands in for Urth, Nessus \_is\_ Urth.

I'd look there.

On 8/31/2010 12:46 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 8/30/2010 9:31 PM, Ryan Dunn wrote:

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Cliff Judge — 31 Aug 2010, 15:19 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Here's a picture of a Hong Kong street that might serve as an imagination aid:

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/move\\_lachine/3511703292/in/set-72157594318161277/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/move_lachine/3511703292/in/set-72157594318161277/)

On Tue, Aug 31, 2010 at 12:28 AM, Gwern Branwen <gwern0 at gmail.com> wrote:

On Mon, Aug 30, 2010 at 10:31 PM, Ryan Dunn <ryan at liftingfaces.com> wrote:

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gwern

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#### Steven Bowen — 31 Aug 2010, 18:14 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

Cobbles are stones used to build the streets. The 'chalk on the wall' imagery suggests grafitti to me. Pretty obvious. He uses the grafitti idea to speak to the illegal nature of the changes. The inability for the authorities to enforce even simple boundary lines like streets.

Steve

On Aug 30, 2010, at 10:31 PM, Ryan Dunn wrote:

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#### Ryan Dunn — 31 Aug 2010, 18:41 · in reply to Steven Bowen

On Aug 31, 2010, at 2:14 PM, Steven Bowen wrote:

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on a wall the right metaphor here. Is he saying there are so many people, that every day a line of buildings might appear, while another might crumble?

Thanks to all for clearing this up. I definitely "get it" now. This makes sense, as the lochage is basically describing how there are too many people to even tax, and the idea of claiming land rights by night, illegally, supports this anarchist dystopia more clearly.

Thanks.

...ryan

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Jerry Friedman — 31 Aug 2010, 23:27 · in reply to Cliff Judge

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I think the people are even clever enough to use the pried-up cobblestones as part of the material for their houses.

Jerry Friedman