

Antipolaric brothers

The Urth list — 19 messages, 7 voices, 21 Nov 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5775>

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Andrew Mason — 21 Nov 2010, 20:28

I've just finished reading BOTLS, which has given me a lot to think about; I'll shortly be re-reading it, and will no doubt be bringing up various questions and thoughts that strike me. But while I was reading it I had general thought about the series.

In SOTT chapter 21, 'The Hut in the Jungle', Severian writes 'If it is true that each of us has an antipolaric brother somewhere, a bright twin if we are dark, a dark twin if we are bright...' The immediate application of this is rather odd - 'that hut was surely such a changeling to one of our cells'. But I'm wondering if it might in some way illuminate a series about someone who has a mysterious origin, is chosen by [a] superhuman being[s] for a significant task, has a death/resurrection experience, becomes lame, becomes a ruler, etc. - but is blond, and impossibly high-minded.

Lee Berman — 22 Nov 2010, 12:50 · follows Andrew Mason

Andrew Mason: But I'm wondering if it might in some way illuminate a series about someone who has a mysterious origin, is chosen by [a] superhuman being[s] for a significant task, has a death/resurrection experience, becomes lame, becomes a ruler, etc. - but is blond, and impossibly high-minded.

Interesting you should bring this up now. I am finishing up RttW and at the end there is a mysterious character on Urth who is tall and blonde with icy eyes and a hawk-like nose. Plus there is a persistent character in the Sun series who may be deduced as having blonde hair. (Typhon)

Still trying to sort my thoughts out but I think perhaps Wolfe is addressing what I will call a "gnostic" concept which may have reached its culmination in Nietzsche who divided aspects of human experience into an Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy. There is a long and diverse preceding history of juxtaposing a rational, detached, orderly sun god with a dark, intoxicating god who emphasizes chaotic personal experience. More later.

James Wynn — 22 Nov 2010, 16:59 · in reply to Andrew Mason

On 11/21/2010 2:28 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:
I've just finished reading BOTLS, which has given me a lot to think about; I'll shortly be re-reading it, and will no doubt be bringing up various questions and thoughts that strike me. But while I was reading it I had general thought about the series.

In SOTT chapter 21, 'The Hut in the Jungle', Severian writes 'If it is true that each of us has an antipolaric brother somewhere, a bright twin if we are dark, a dark twin if we are bright...' The immediate application of this is rather odd - 'that hut was surely such a changeling to one of our cells'. But I'm wondering if it might in some

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Urth Mailing List

Lee Berman — 23 Nov 2010, 02:39 · follows James Wynn

James Wynn: There's something twinny about Silk and Auk that I've never quite been able to put my finger on. Thematically, they divide the deeds of Hephaestus between them.... I don't know. But I _do_ think there is a meta-connection between Silk and Sev as well. I think the fact that Wolfe had the Rajan meet Severian and justifies it as necessary in the telling of the story implies that this is so.

James I'm hoping you will explain what you mean about the deeds of Hephaestus and these two characters.

I do like Andrew's dark/light twin comparison of Severian and Silk. Not sure Wolfe had Silk in mind when he first wrote about it. I think perhaps Silk's progenitor, Typhon is a more likely subject. I think perhaps this is why the Silk-Pas connection was sort of kept under wraps for most of the story.

I am currently noticing that despite his apparent evil, Typhon is on both Urth and the Whorl, an organizer and builder, while Severian, in his crowning achievement is a destroyer. The good/evil, creator/destroyer dichotomy is an issue I think is intrinsically addressed by gnosticism and I am still wrestling for some understanding there. Perhaps, slowly, it is coming.

Something recently occurred to me. Severian wasn't really in so much danger of being killed by Typhon. I think the episode parallels Severian's pounding of Eata. The purpose of the beating was to establish dominance not to harm. Typhon's insistence on Severian taking stewardship of Urth resembles Severian's insistence that Eata be his second. Yet, despite being far more overmatched than Eata, something in Severian will not accept lieutenant/second banana status. (perhaps this is why Roche was written as Drotte's second and not Severian).

Since you mention Auk I'd like to mention the character of Pig. By name and by other clues we can associate Pig with the goddess Phaea. But I think his blindness and his manner of speech connect him to Tartaros and his human associate, Auk. I don't know if it relates to what you were saying, James but I find a similarity in the relationship between Silk and Auk and Silkhorn and Pig. Still not really sure what was going on with regard to Pig and Hyacinths's room.

Jeff Wilson — 23 Nov 2010, 05:27 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 11/22/2010 6:50 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

Andrew Mason: But I'm wondering if it might in some way illuminate a series about someone who has a mysterious origin, is chosen by [a] superhuman being[s] for a significant task, has a death/resurrection experience, becomes lame, becomes a ruler, etc. - but is blond, and impossibly high-minded.

Interesting you should bring this up now. I am finishing up RttW and at the end there is a mysterious character on Urth who is tall and blonde with icy eyes and a hawk-like nose.

Dux Caesidius?

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

James Wynn — 23 Nov 2010, 14:35 · in reply to Lee Berman

Lee Berman-

James I'm hoping you will explain what you mean about the deeds of Hephaestus and these two characters.

Somewhere I have them more carefully detailed. But Hesphaestus was conceived by Hera without the need of a mate. When he was born, he was so ugly and so his mother threw him off of Mt Olympus into the sea. But he was rescued by the sea goddesses Thetis and Eurynome. They set him up in a workshop in an undersea cave where he made marvelous works of craftsmanship. In his workshop, Hesp had mechanical women who operated as his assistants. One day Hera saw Thetis wearing a brooch that Hesp had made and demanded to know where she got it. She told her about Hesp and so he was brought back to Olympus (in a parade that was very reminiscent of Dionysus's coming to Olympus). So then one day, the Olympians overthrew Zeus and bound him to a chair. Thetis identified Hera, Poseidon, and Athena as the ring-leaders but Robert Graves included Apollo. Then they began fighting over who would be the leader. Thetis went down to Tartaros and released the Briareus, the hundred armed monster that Kronos and imprisoned there. With his speedy arms he was able to untie Zeus before the others knew what had happened. Now back in power, Zeus turned his wrath against Hera. According to Graves again, Hesphaestus came to the defense of his mother and so Zeus blasted him with his lighting bolt, knocks him off the mountain (again) at which point he was lamed. Then Zeus hanged Hera from Mt Olympus (the heavens) by a golden chain.

So Silk performs the deeds of Hesphaestus on Mt. Olympus and Auk performs his deeds in his undersea cave. Quetzal says that the ring-leaders who "killed" Pas as Echidna, Scylla, Molpe, and Hierax and says "there may have been others". In the caves of Lake Limna, Auk --armed with a keyword "Thetis" and Chenille (recently possessed by the sea goddess Scylla)-- released the prisoners (hundred-handed Briarius) from the hellish Alambra pits as part of the plan to resurrect Pas (http://urth.org/whorlmap/binding_zeus.htm). Also, at his side is the black mechanic, Incus, whom I argue is actually Maytera Corn (ear of corn) --a mechanical woman-- who will later assist him in his work of repairing Sand.

As for Silk, well, for starters it helps to recognize that there are associations between Hy and Silk's mom, but it is not necessary. During their conversation, Silk _defends_ Echidna's celibacy rule. Then Hy jumps up on the bed with her azoth (both a lighting bolt and a golden chain). She fires her azoth at him, sending him tumbling out of the window where he is lamed. This event is a combination of Hesp being cast off of Mt Olympus by Hera and by Zeus.

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Jack Smith — 23 Nov 2010, 14:42 · in reply to James Wynn

Great mythological reference. I thought I knew Greek myths but I must have missed this one.

On Tue, Nov 23, 2010 at 9:35 AM, James Wynn <crushtv@gmail.com> wrote:

Lee Berman-

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Quetzal says that the ring-leaders who "killed" Pas as Echidna, Scylla, Molpe, and Hierax and says "there may have been others".

In the caves of Lake Limna, Auk --armed with a keyword "Thetis" and Chenille (recently possessed by the sea goddess Scylla)-- released the prisoners (hundred-handed Briarius) from the hellish Alambra pits as part of the plan to resurrect Pas (

http://urth.org/whorlmap/binding_zeus.htm). Also, at his side is the black mechanic, Incus, whom I argue is actually Maytera Corn (ear of corn) --a mechanical woman-- who will later assist him in his work of repairing Sand.

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Andrew Mason — 23 Nov 2010, 20:23 · follows Jack Smith

Lee Berman wrote:

Plus there is a persistent character in the Sun series who

may be deduced as having blonde hair. (Typhon)

If I remember rightly, you have to have _Urth_ to deduce that, so as _Urth_ wasn't part of the original plan, I don't think it can be a really central part of the

symbolism - though no doubt it means something. I wouldn't suppose that hair colours have a single meaning that runs all the way through. For instance, Severian's father and paternal grandmother are blond, while his mother is dark - I suspect this is just to help him work out his origins. But given the many parallels between Severian and Silk (I've just noticed another - both are wounded in the chest) I think it may be significant in their case. (On the other hand, both wear a dark robe.)

There is a long and diverse preceding history of juxtaposing a rational, detached, orderly sun god with a dark, intoxicating god who emphasizes chaotic personal experience. More later.

I wonder - Severian is a solar figure, despite being dark in various ways - hence his title of 'black sun', I suppose.

James Wynn wrote:

There's something twinnish about Silk and Auk that I've never quite been able to put my finger on. Thematically, they divide the deeds of Hephaestus between them. Narratively, Silk shrives Auk before the "solving" of Blood's House. Auk shrives Silk afterward. The very term "solving" as an activity is a parallel between them as Silk plays detective and Auk is a thief.

Yes, I agree with this - so within Long Sun Auk can be seen as a dark twin - and of course the god who chooses him is the dark god. . (It's actually quite striking how central his role in the story is - if someone other than Horn had written it, it might have come out as The Book of Auk.)

But a nitpick - doesn't Auk also shrive Silk before the 'solving'? (The idea that you can be absolved before committing a sin is one of the things that makes it clear this religion is a parody.)

Andrew Mason — 23 Nov 2010, 22:49 · follows Andrew Mason

Lee Berman wrote:

I do like Andrew's dark/light twin comparison of Severian and Silk. Not sure Wolfe had Silk in mind when he first wrote about it.

Well, as I understand it, Long Sun wasn't planned at the time, and it was only while he was working on it that Wolfe came to see it as connected with New Sun, so the Severian/Silk parallelism must have been something he thought up later. Does Severian have an antipolaric brother within New Sun? I'm not sure (and I don't see Typhon as fitting the part, certainly not without the extra knowledge of him we get from Long Sun).

Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 11/22/2010 6:50 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

Interesting you should bring this up now. I am finishing up RttW and at the end there is a mysterious character on Urth who is tall and blonde with icy eyes and a hawk-like nose.

Dux Caesidius?

Are we ever told Caesidius' hair colour? (Not having read RTTW, I don't know the significance of this passage; but it might help us work out possible connections between him and Severian.)

David Stockhoff — 24 Nov 2010, 00:08 · in reply to James Wynn

Nice, James.

On 11/23/2010 9:35 AM, James Wynn wrote:

Lee Berman-

James I'm hoping you will explain what you mean about the deeds of Hephaestus and these two characters.

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Lee Berman — 24 Nov 2010, 03:23 · follows David Stockhoff

Andrew Mason: Are we ever told Caesidius' hair colour?

Severian remembers Dux Caesidius as being "a fine commander" with a "hawk face"

Eata remarks that Valeria may have married him because he looked like Severian though handsomer and taller. I think that's all we get.

Hard to think of a blonde guy with icy eyes resembling Severian but it is possible.

On the other hand, the character at the end of RttW is steering a ship and while "commander" can be a general military term, it is foremost a naval rank, I think.

Cyriaca gives the most detailed description of Severian's face but she doesn't mention his nose. I can imagine it being aquiline, as I tend to think Severian is patterned after a Greek hero.

Either way a good catch by Jeff to connect the hawk-like features of these two.

Andrew Mason — 25 Nov 2010, 01:47 · follows Lee Berman

Lee Berman wrote: >

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Hard to think of a blonde guy with icy eyes resembling Severian but it is possible.

Ouen had a noticeable resemblance to Severian while being blond, so I wouldn't rule it out.

On the other hand, the character at the end of RttW is steering a ship and while "commander" can be a general military term, it is foremost a naval rank, I think.

'Commander' is a naval rank, but if it's spelt with a small c i'm not sure that signifies. Was not the idea that Valeria entrusted the armed forces as a whole to him, letting him perform the military part of the Autarch's function? And indeed, is it clear that the Commonwealth has a navy?

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I'm guessing the statement that Caesidius had a hawk face and looked like him is meant to be a clue.

Jeff Wilson — 25 Nov 2010, 18:57 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 11/23/2010 9:23 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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Eata remarks that Valeria may have married him because he looked like Severian though handsomer and taller. I think that's all we get.

Hard to think of a blonde guy with icy eyes resembling Severian but it is possible.

Or the light hair could be premature grey, I suppose.

On the other hand, the character at the end of RttW is steering a ship and while "commander" can be a general military term, it is foremost a naval rank, I think.

Cyriaca gives the most detailed description of Severian's face but she doesn't mention his nose. I can imagine it being aquiline, as I tend to think Severian is patterned after a Greek hero.

At some point, Severian says he has a straight nose, but a straight nose is readily converted into a hooked or curved aquiline one through being broken once or several times. This hook nose could parallel Sev's cheek scar, broken by a mighty blow that displaced the helmet that otherwise protected a monied campaigner's head.

Either way a good catch by Jeff to connect the hawk-like features of these two.

Thanks!

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

Lee Berman — 26 Nov 2010, 15:32 · follows Jeff Wilson

On further consideration I am now more firmly sold on the conclusion that the blonde, hawk-nosed guy steering the ship at the end of RttW is meant to represent Typhon. It just doesn't seem right that a revelation in the grand finale of a 12 book series would be as anti-climactic as Dux Caesidius.

Still, I think Dux's resemblance to Severian, implying a shared aquiline nose is important. It reinforces the idea of Typhon and Severian resemble each other, as antipolaric brothers should. The Mandragora also reinforces this link.

My further consideration was inspired by reviewing a conversation Hoof and SilkHorn are having about making these Red Sun Whorl trips. Hoof is wondering why Pas would allow Scylla to make the journey with them to the Red Sun Whorl. SilkHorn says that he would not, unless there was a way that Pas could also make the journey. The issue, like so many others in this series, is left unresolved, unexplained: so where is Pas?

Making this dream-journey to the Red Sun Whorl seems to reveal the true essence of a person or something like that. Scylla appears as a young woman (with snake-like arms). So, I think Pas' true essence as a tall, hawk-nosed blonde guy is also revealed. I'm not sure if he is there as the aspect of Pas found in Silkhorn or maybe he has possessed the inhumu who is with them. But I think it is Typhon we are seeing.

The scene also invokes (for me) one of the most important scenes from 5HoC. It is a dream sequence in which Number Five's father is steering a ship, refusing to untie it from the dock until he can determine what is impeding the progress of the ship. It is meant to symbolize the self-defeating nature of cloning and trying to micro-manage and overcontrol the world and one's self/family.

I think this dream scene was the germ of a continuing gnostic theme in Wolfe's work. In BotNS

Typhon takes the role of light, over-controlling Creator while Severian is his antipolaric brother, the dark, chaos-bringing Destroyer.

Jeff Wilson — 26 Nov 2010, 16:39 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 11/26/2010 9:32 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

I think this dream scene was the germ of a continuing gnostic theme in Wolfe's work. In BotNS Typhon takes the role of light, over-controlling Creator while Severian is his antipolaric brother, the dark, chaos-bringing Destroyer.

I'm pretty sure that Severian's destruction of Typhon should be seen to prevent an enormous amount of chaos; at the very least Typhon's return to the Commonwealth would mean a civil war, and if he won, a tyranny of his whim would descend where no one could be secure in anything. T's mind-control power eliminates the need for him to treat even his most powerful allies well, leaving not even a show of mutuality to leaven his dominion once the oath has been sworn.

In this, Severian is the rightful executioner of the man who sought to usurp all authority, even the Increate's, and allows what pitiful remnant of law and order the Urthlings have managed to keep together to endure a little longer.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
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Son of Witz — 26 Nov 2010, 17:09 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Nov 26, 2010, at 8:39 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

On 11/26/2010 9:32 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

I think this dream scene was the germ of a continuing gnostic theme in Wolfe's work. In BotNS Typhon takes the role of light, over-controlling Creator while Severian is his antipolaric brother, the dark, chaos-bringing Destroyer.

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
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Yes, thank you. I was digging Lee's post until that.

Severian is a star of light and life, not a dark chaotic force. Typhon is clearly the master of the failed state of humanity that Severian is destined to wash away. Typhon is the crown on the thousands of years of stagnant humanity. Destruction is only one side of Severian's coin. What he did was bring life. The destruction was already in place, in slow motion. He reanimate the sun and urth, he doesn't destroy them. If he failed, they would self destruct.

For myself, the antipolaric brother comment mostly serves to focus on the Hut in the Jungle as an opposite to an Oubliette cell. It is hard to see much significance in that scene until that line.

Now we have some context for it. In the cell there is no true light, and no hope. In the hut in the jungle, we've got light and hope, and an interesting culture clash where both sides are not hearing each other talk about the same sort of thing. The missionaries are preaching New Testament and Insangoma is preaching New Sun. It's pretty funny actually.

~witz

Lee Berman — 26 Nov 2010, 19:15 · follows Son of Witz

Jeff Wilson- I'm pretty sure that Severian's destruction of Typhon should be seen to prevent an enormous amount of chaos;

When I spoke of Severian in the Destroyer role I was speaking in terms of his cosmic, divine role in bringing the Flood which destroys Urth and allows the formation of Ushas. I consider his conflict with Typhon to be a personal one, though ultimately with divine implications as we eventually learn from his eventual destiny.

Son o'Witz- Severian is a star of light and life, not a dark chaotic force. Typhon is clearly the master of the failed state of humanity that Severian is destined to wash away. Typhon is the crown on the thousands of years of stagnant humanity. Destruction is only one side of Severian's coin. What he did was bring life. The destruction was already in place, in slow motion. He reanimate the sun and urth, he doesn't destroy them.

Son o', I think you are drifting in the direction that I, and maybe Gene Wolfe, are getting at with references to gnostic thought. I am not an expert in this stuff, though I've been trying to absorb as much as I can about it lately. I would welcome any contributions or suggestions from those who are more knowledgeable than me.

In Jeff Wilson's response I get a sense of a worldview of someone with a lifetime of immersion in Judeo-Christian religion/philosophy/culture. Almost all of us here share in that culture. All our lives we have been consciously and unconsciously conditioned to think of light and creation as inherently Good and dark and destruction as inherently Bad. The God of the Old Testament is a bringer of light and the Creator of everything and thus He is the ultimate in goodness.

We know that not all the world nor history embraces the Judeo-Christian view but, perhaps with some exceptions, we here have not been immersed in an alternate worldview and can't help but always be biased toward Judeo-Christian thinking. I used to think Gnosticism was just an archaic, alternative approach to Christianity..sorta connected to Kabbalah or whatever. Not very popular or important. I've recently learned otherwise.

Some think Gnosticism got its origin in Alexander's empire, allowing a free flow of religious ideas to flow and mix from the pantheon of the Greeks to the mysticism of India. It was central to the writings of Plato and still has a strong impact on our mainstream media. It's influence can be found from the goat god of the Celts to the Taoism of the Far East (no coincidence that the Yin Yang symbol resembles the greek Ouroboros snake which eats its own tail). I think Wolfe chooses Persian Eschatology and Genesis names (like Meschia) because of this region being the geographic and perhaps spiritual center of Gnosticism.

Central to the philosophy is that balance between light and dark, creation and destruction is needed. One feeds off the other and if one becomes too strong, the whole system will collapse. I can remember being younger and learning about Hinduism with Creator Brahma, Destroyer Shiva and Preserver Vishnu and figuring this was good guys against bad guy and not quite understanding why their Hindu believers valued and worshipped them equally.

For a couple thousand years, Christianity and Gnosticism have been at odds, each demonizing the other. Even modern Gnostics (like Wiccans) consider that Christians have over-elevated an evil creative, light-bringing demiurge as their god, one who enslaves with an authoritarian iron fist, demanding work ethic, obedience, chastity, sobriety and other principles at odds with true human nature. The modern Gnostic groups prefer their nature-loving, fun-seeking dark Dionysian god(s).

[FWIW- I think this is the religious underpinning of The Matrix movie series and why they cast an old white guy, with white hair and beard, dressed in white as the oppressive Creator/Architect of The Matrix and why they cast a black woman dressed in green as The Oracle/Satan who throws a chaotic monkey-wrench into the Architect's carefully calibrated machine.]

Jeff Wilson — 26 Nov 2010, 22:38 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 11/26/2010 1:15 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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I'm not subscribed to such a one-sided view as that; He is equally the ultimate in evil and misfortune, since His sovereignty encompasses the universe and everything in it, but the lesser creatures within insist on projecting their subjective values onto His works and misattributing them to one another. Severian's destructive sure, but so is the eraser destructive of writing, and the tide a destroyer of sand castles; Severian's destructive mission is not a harbinger of chaos (usually) but more like a broom that sweeps decrepit cobwebs away to leave the stage clean for the next act.

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< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Andrew Mason — 28 Nov 2010, 18:27 · follows Jeff Wilson

I think I'd agree with SonofWitz that the idea, in its original context, is meant simply to point up the contrast between the jungle hut and a cell. It's a bit odd that a theory which seems in origin to be about people is applied instead to places; but if it is, as I would suppose, a real theory which exists somewhere, this new application of it may not be too surprising. So I don't see a need to look for any antipolaric brothers within New Sun. I just think this idea might have later become an inspiration in the writing of Long Sun, both in relation to Severian and Silk and to Silk and Auk.

I'm very doubtful about any general contrast between creators and destroyers; creating one thing generally involves destroying another. Severian is both a creative and a destructive figure; and so, I think, is Typhon. I also think Typhon is definitely a chaotic figure. The old Autarch says that the first empire failed because the people of Urth carried all their wars out into the universe and started new ones there. The reason humans cannot yet return to the stars is the fear that they will do the same again. So it would seem that Typhon's plans for empire, if successful, would have led to something similar; and looking at what happens on the Whorl, this seems to be right.

That, of course, leaves it a bit puzzling what 'bright' and 'dark' do mean. I certainly don't think they mean 'good' and 'evil'; neither Severian nor Auk is evil. But intuitively, I think 'dark' does fit them, while 'bright' fits Silk.