

Are the Neighbors REALLY the Neighbors?

The Urth list — 25 messages, 7 voices, 14 Feb 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5972>

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Jordon Flato — 14 Feb 2011, 22:22

Thinking about all of these ideas flying around recently about the nature of dream travel and its mechanics, a crazy idea occurred to me. It's really crazy, and not at all likely to be true (although compared to some theories it might possibly be made viable with some creative readings of the text).

The question occasionally comes up as to what dream traveling inhumis fed on neighbors would look like? This made me think "what if we never actually meet neighbors? What if what we are seeing as neighbors in the books are actually dream traveling inhumis who LOOK like neighbors because that is what their souls are like, much like an inhumis fed on humanity appears human in dream travel? What if they seeded the Whorl and try to get Horn to stay on blue as a means of ensuring their progeny's existence?

Preposterous. And yet, there is a subtle clue in that the possibly only fully corporeal 'neighbor' we meet is the barnacle encrusted monstrosity that tries to climb aboard the boat with Horn early in Blue (? is that when it happens?) Maybe this a clue that there are only Zombie neighbors left, and that all we see of the neighbors from Silk-Horns perspective are these dream traveling Inhumis...

Preposterous, I know. Or is it? Dum dum DUUUUUUM.. (cue dramatic gopher video)...

António Pedro Marques — 15 Feb 2011, 00:47 · in reply to Jordon Flato

Jordon Flato wrote:

(...) What if what we are seeing as neighbors in the books are actually dream traveling inhumis who LOOK like neighbors because that is what their souls are like, much like an inhumis fed on humanity appears human in dream travel? (...)

I see nothing preposterous about it. In fact, the idea is that neighbour-fed dream-travelling inhumis would be indistinguishable from dream-travelling neighbours. The problem is that, if we can't tell them apart, we can't tell if it is so either. It might help if we ever met neighbour-fed *not*-dream-travelling inhumis, but they can be anywhere the neighbours can.

Lee Berman — 15 Feb 2011, 05:23 · follows António Pedro Marques

Jordon Flato: What if what we are seeing as neighbors in the books are actually dream traveling inhumis who LOOK like neighbors because that is what their souls are like.

I think I see where this is coming from. Still I lean in the direction of James' theory that dream travel is the province of Neighbors (and thus SilkHorn is part Neighbor). I think the Neighbors Horn encounters are dream travelling Neighbors, purely. They seem to be sort of there and not there, like the sort of beings who could pass through walls but also be able to shake your hand (or have sex or bleed).

And yet, there is a subtle clue in that the possibly only fully corporeal 'neighbor' we meet is the barnacle encrusted monstrosity that tries to climb aboard the boat with Horn early in Blue (? is that when it happens?)

Well, middle of the book (pg. 163 in my copy). And that certainly seems to be the best conclusion based on Horn's theory of that thing which he tries to dismiss but, c'mon, is Wolfe really going to waste 3 paragraphs on a false theory? Why would he?

The idea Horn has about the creature is that one Neighbor is blessed (but really cursed) with immortality. He lives his life in immortal debauchery for a few centuries but then all his fellow species-members have "dwindled". He throws himself into the sea to be succored by the goddess who favored him. This goddess is surely The Mother as Seawrack has a power of persuasion over this immensely strong creature.

So where did all his species members "Vanish" to? I agree with those who theorize they are on a "neighboring" plane of existence. So what we call "death" is something which frees the Neighbors to go to another (better?) place, except for this one immortal guy (and the immortal goddess who succors him in barnacle crusted glory).

[I always think of this creature when they show Bill Turner from Pirates of the Caribbean http://assets.nydailynews.com/img/2007/05/23/gal_pirates_2.jpg]

David Stockhoff — 15 Feb 2011, 12:33 · in reply to Lee Berman

I'm one of those theorizers, but let's try to reconcile this with what they told Silkhorn:

Of the Neighbors Silkhorn said:

"As for me, I have walked with them, and sat with them around their fire. Thus I know that they exist. They have gone elsewhere -- found a new home circling another short sun. But they have our permission to revisit this one whenever they choose." (IGJ, 72)

-Roy

My assumption is that even if they are on another plane/dimension/level, they still need a short sun and a spherical lump of rock, gas, and water to live on.

On 2/15/2011 12:23 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

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Lee Berman — 15 Feb 2011, 13:38 · follows David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff: My assumption is that even if they are on another plane/dimension/level, they still need a short sun and a spherical lump of rock, gas, and water to live on.

Yes, absolutely. My guess is that the dream-travel phenomenon is travel between two closely related time strands. So back on the "home planet", beings have to follow all the laws of the physical universe just as we do.

But when they travel to a close parallel time strand, they have travelled to another universe.

Since the universe is different, some physical laws are no longer followed. But since it is a very close universe much is also the same.

Neighbors are faerie to Horn and others on Blue. Humans and inhumans are faerie to those they visit when they dream travel. I think it is something like that.

James Wynn — 15 Feb 2011, 14:37 · in reply to Lee Berman

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Lee Berman-

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Actually, it is not at all uncommon for Wolfe to spend paragraphs of a hand-wringing over theories that are wrong but alert the reader to a puzzle to be solved. An obvious example (to me) is when Silk spends 2 or 3 pages speculating on why he called Blood "son" on their first meeting. A good rule of thumb for reading Wolfe is that when a theory is offered, it is probably wrong in some key way (although in some ways correct as well).

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David Stockhoff — 15 Feb 2011, 14:40 · in reply to James Wynn

On 2/15/2011 9:37 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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Right, and if Wolfe is being parsimonious, the right and wrong parts tell us more about the character doing the theorizing than about the problem itself.

Lee Berman — 15 Feb 2011, 15:23 · follows David Stockhoff

James Wynn: Actually, it is not at all uncommon for Wolfe to spend paragraphs of a hand-wringing over theories that are wrong but alert the reader to a puzzle to be solved. An obvious example (to me) is when Silk spends 2 or 3 pages speculating on why he called Blood "son" on their first meeting. A good rule of thumb for reading Wolfe is that when a theory is offered, it is probably wrong in some key way (although in some ways correct as well).

David Stockhoff: Right, and if Wolfe is being parsimonious, the right and wrong parts tell us more about the character doing the theorizing than about the problem itself.

I agree with both of these assessments so I consider myself suitably chastened in regard to general Wolfean auctorial tropes. Still I think this particular passage is a somewhat unique example/exception.

Since we already know so much about Horn, I don't think these paragraphs are written primarily for expository revelation about the narrator. They really are about the crusty, barnacle creature.

With Blood and Silk and other elements of the story, we have multiple sections discussing these characters and their relationships. So we have a basis for correcting a wrong theory by a character. For this passage this is all we ever get regarding the crusty barnacle guy. So by what basis could we correct anything that Horn gets wrong?

I'm willing to accept enough of what Horn says to agree with the portion of Marc's theory that this is the only example of a fully flesh-and-blood Neighbor that we see.

Horn uses examples from The Whorl of people ostensibly blessed but really cursed by wealth or other gifts from the gods (James, interesting that you mention Blood) as the basis for his theory. To me this hearkens to similar examples from earth's own mythology, most obviously Midas (a reference I think would be of great interest to James). Perhaps this is how gifts from the gods on all whorls work (so what does that say about Severian and his divine gift?).

Wolfe makes the crusty creature so strong it swats Babbie aside like a fly. A bit speculative but this reminds me of Nephilim- biblical men of reknown, Baldanders etc. Perhaps this barnacle guy is Blue's version.

James Wynn — 15 Feb 2011, 16:13 · in reply to Lee Berman

Lee Berman-

I'm willing to accept enough of what Horn says to agree with the portion of Marc's theory that this is the only example of a fully flesh-and-blood Neighbor that we see.

We have so little to go on regarding Ol' Barnacles. I've always wanted to connect him to the Rajan--sort of a Severian-Apu Punchau-style encounter or a Pike's Ghost encounter. Unfortunately, if that's true, we have as much hope of untwining that mystery as we did the Apu Punchau mystery without "The Urth of the New Sun", or Pike's Ghost without "The Book of the Short Sun".

On the other hand, I would say that still makes Mr. Barnacles a Neighbor.

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If one presumes that Silk was a clone of Typhon, Barnacles-as-Midas works perfectly.

Incidentally, Latro's curse from the gods is also said to be a blessing. It causes him to lose his memory but also enables him to see the divine and be a mediator between the divine and the mundane--touch the divine and it becomes visible in the mundane realm. In other words, "divine curse" and "divine blessing" are explained to be just alternate terms for "touched by a god".

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Lee Berman — 15 Feb 2011, 17:06 · follows James Wynn

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Isn't that the way of it, yes. Seems it doesn't matter if it is Hercules, Moses, Zoroaster or Jesus, the touch of God is both a blessing and curse on a man's life. Apologies for irreverence but I can imagine the same attributions being placed on the lives of 20th Century heroes like Gandhi or MLK jr. 2000 years from now.

If one presumes that Silk was a clone of Typhon, Barnacles-as-Midas works perfectly.

I shouldn't need explanation for this but I might. IIRC, in your theory, Midas figures into the Spring Wind/Typhon legend perhaps with Alexander's story as a mediating influence. But I think the connection isn't the obvious one involving Alexander's cutting of Midas' Gordian Knot. How does the connection work?

James Wynn — 15 Feb 2011, 18:21 · in reply to Lee Berman

If one presumes that Silk was a clone of Typhon, Barnacles-as-Midas works perfectly.

Lee-

I shouldn't need explanation for this but I might. IIRC, in your theory, Midas figures into the Spring Wind/Typhon legend perhaps with Alexander's story as a mediating influence. But I think the connection isn't the obvious one involving Alexander's cutting of Midas' Gordian Knot. How does the connection work?

Well, it would be nice if Wolfe had worked such a connection into the story. He's pretty good about that sort of thing. I haven't detected it, but it might be that I've failed to catch an allusion.

Typhon, as you say, is an Alexander-figure. When Kypris says of him that took over the world so fast and no one could believe it, I thought of Alexander immediately. Additionally, Alexander is member of an important legendary triad that I think was appealing to Wolfe: Alexander, Moses, and the Green Man.

The Midas connection is more allusive but he keeps popping up. His main connection to the story is through Dionysus. Midas found drunk Silenus in his rose garden. He took him in and was regaled with a story of a continent to the West inhabited by the ancient-living powerful Hyperboreans (Neighbors). In thanks for caring for his mentor, Dionysus granted Midas his golden touch. Then inspired by Silenus' stories, he sends an expedition of 10 million colonists to the land of the Hyperboreans. On the way, they encounter a whirlpool (Short Sun) with a stream nearby where two trees were growing: The fruit of one would cause the eater to weep, groan, and pine away (Green). The fruit of the other would make the eater young again, and younger, until he became an infant and then disappeared (Blue; Horn speaks of the colony moving back in time in technology).

The Book of the Long Sun is plotted over the life of Aristaeus, as described by Robert Graves, as described by Herodotus, as described by Pindar (Soldier of the Mist). Aristaeus is the author of the story of the Hyperborans.

Finally, Alexander, Midas, and Dionysus all have horns. D is the "two-horned god". Alexander is depicted with horns on his coins. Quetzal, the Whorl's demon-Dionysus, plants a tamarin tree outside his window, and that particular species plays a key role in India's version of a Midas story--in which Midas grows horns instead of donkey ears.

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 Feb 2011, 18:32 · in reply to James Wynn

On Tue, Feb 15, 2011 at 10:21 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
Finally, Alexander, Midas, and Dionysus all have horns.

Which also reminds me that Michelangelo famously depicted Moses with horns.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

James Wynn — 15 Feb 2011, 18:47 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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Ah, yes! I had mentioned that elsewhere, but forgot to mention it here. Moses *does* have horns which is why he and Alexander are called "the two horned ones" in the Koran.

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 Feb 2011, 19:00 · in reply to James Wynn

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Ah, yes! I had mentioned that elsewhere, but forgot to mention it here.
Moses *does* have horns which is why he and Alexander are called "the two horned ones" in the Koran.

Well, no; Moses does not have horns; that is a mistranslation of the passage that actually says his face was radiant after spending time with G_d on the mountaintop.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

James Wynn — 15 Feb 2011, 19:09 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Ah, yes! I had mentioned that elsewhere, but forgot to mention it here.
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horned ones" in the Koran.

Well, no; Moses does not have horns; that is a mistranslation of the passage that actually says his face was radiant after spending time with G_d on the mountaintop.

Tomayto tomahto. Alexander the Great also didn't actually have horns either (and Mars is a farmer not a soldier). The point is that according to Islamic and Berber tradition, he and Moses are connected by their meeting through the mediation of the Green Man, and in the fact that they have horns--even sharing a title "The Two Horned Ones".

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Lee Berman — 15 Feb 2011, 19:36 · follows James Wynn

Finally, Alexander, Midas, and Dionysus all have horns.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes- Which also reminds me that Michelangelo famously depicted Moses with horns.

Oh sheesh, I hadn't heard of that. I wonder if Wolfe made the horned connection to Moses (correct or not) with the possible Dionysian/Father Inire iteration Isangoma being associated with the Mosaic Mt. Nebo.

Was a horned Moses a way of Michelangelo saying the jews have been made scapegoats?

The origin of that term seems to have come from the goat-associated fallen angel Azazel.

Prometheus, Azazel, Moses, Fenrir all seem to be mythological guys who received blame and were punished by being bound to (or under) a rock. I guess Typhon also fits that category. Hints of all these guys seem to peek from behind the bushes of BotNS.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 Feb 2011, 19:47 · in reply to Lee Berman

Lee Berman wrote:

Was a horned Moses a way of Michelangelo saying the jews have been made scapegoats?

There's some argument about what it means. The majority believe that it comes from a misreading of Exodus, as I indicated previously; however there is a group who believe that the horns on Moses' head were Michelangelo's attempt to depict "radiant" in stone, which, if so, obviously didn't work out so well.

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Moses bound to/under a rock? Where's this?

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Suddenly I have a glimpse of an interpretive schema in which Typhon is actually the real hero of the Solar cycle...

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

James Wynn — 15 Feb 2011, 21:01 · in reply to Lee Berman

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes-

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horns.

Lee-

Oh sheesh, I hadn't heard of that. I wonder if Wolfe made the horned connection to Moses (correct or not) with the possible Dionysian/Father Inire iteration Isangoma being associated with the Mosaic Mt. Nebo. Was a horned Moses a way of Michelangelo saying the jews have been made scapegoats? The origin of that term seems to have come from the goat-associated fallen angel Azazel.

I don't think so. It was a common misunderstanding based on (I think) St. Jerome's translation. In fact, I believe there was a commonly held myth in some places that all Jews have horns under their hats.

But there is (was) a theoretical association between that Mt. Sinai and Dionysus' Mt. Nyssa. I don't know if that association was based on the idea that they both had horns or if the associations arose independently. It would be very Wolfean if the histories of these ideas were independent and then converged.

On 2/15/2011 1:47 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Suddenly I have a glimpse of an interpretive schema in which Typhon is actually the real hero of the Solar cycle...

My personal interpretive schema is that Typhon is the failed hero of the pre-Red Sun Urth Cycle. I think "An Evil Guest" is sort of an attempt to tell that story.

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Lee Berman — 15 Feb 2011, 21:12 · follows James Wynn

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes: There's some argument about what it means. The majority believe that it comes from a misreading of Exodus, as I indicated previously; however there is a group who believe that the horns on Moses' head were Michelangelo's attempt to depict "radiant" in stone, which, if so, obviously didn't work out so well.

Okay, I was confused whether this was a Koran or Exodus misreading. Looks like it was a Latin translation of the Bible that got "cornuta" or horned as the description of Moses' face while the Greek got "glorified" and Hebrew got "radiant".

But you know, I'm with Wolfe here. The ancient people were just as smart and clever with words as we are. Perhaps more so, since their visual depictions were more limited and labor-intensive than ours. They knew they were messing around by calling Moses "horned". And surely a master like

Michaelangelo would know that giving a guy only two short stubby "rays of light" would make a Jewish guy look more goat-like than radiant.

<http://www.christianity-revealed.com/cr/images/moses1.jpg>

The whole statue of Moses looks very Dionysian to me.

<http://static.howstuffworks.com/gif/michelangelo-sculptures-16.jpg>

Moses bound to/under a rock? Where's this?

Well, not with a chain. But he was unable to go past Mt. Nebo, only viewing the promised land from there.

And he died soon after viewing it. Does Wolfe (and Michaelangelo?) make the connection between Moses and

Prometheus/Azazel and scapegoats? I dunno. Bringer of fire, light, laws, war, weapons, beautification and

taking the blame and punishment from a jealous father god seems to be a recurring underlying theme in ancient religion. (actually bringing water inappropriately was apparently Moses' biggest sin).

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I kinda know what you mean. I always hated Typhon and considered him the worst of all villains. Until it occurred

to me that he didn't really do anything so bad, especially with regard to Severian. No different than what

Severian did to Eata in coercing him to be his second. Some conquering, some ruling, some sexual perversion but

no worse than the Commonwealth is, in its current state. Who did more for humanity, Typhon or Severian...

It seems to me that maybe in the Sun Series things are just reversed from Christianity. The Outsider is a dark God who

casts sun and light gods as villains, while ours is a God of Light who casts the dark gods of paganism as villains.

Is finding balance what Jesus did for our universe? Grasping at straws but...at least grasping.

Gerry Quinn — 15 Feb 2011, 21:17 · in reply to Lee Berman

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

The whole statue of Moses looks very Dionysian to me.

<http://static.howstuffworks.com/gif/michelangelo-sculptures-16.jpg>

Yeah... it really brings the androgyny out ;-)

- Gerry Quinn

James Wynn — 15 Feb 2011, 21:51 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 2/15/2011 3:12 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

Okay, I was confused whether this was a Koran or Exodus misreading. Looks like it was a Latin translation of the Bible that got "cornuta" or horned as the description of Moses' face while the Greek got "glorified" and Hebrew got "radiant".

Remember that Mohammed grew up in a Christianized society. The Koran takes some divergent paths from Orthodox Christianity but, for example, it accepts the virgin birth of Jesus as a given. If the Koran has a conceptual error regarding Moses, it probably came from Christians.

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David Stockhoff — 15 Feb 2011, 22:07 · in reply to Lee Berman

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The woman read: "Then he went up from the plain to Mt. Nebo, the headland that faces the city, and the Compassionating showed him the whole country, all the land as far as the Western Sea. Then he said to him: 'This is the land I swore to your fathers I should give their sons. You have seen it, but you shall not set your feet upon it.' So there he died, and was buried in the ravine."

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You mean Typhon is one of those blond jock heroes we love to hate even though they are really decent enough, and Severian is a chainsmoking goth in black, the kind of rebel/antihero we love to love? I seem to recall Lancelot being like that. I think Wolfe has touched on that theme elsewhere. (Or Jack vs Sawyer, for a Lost analogy.)

It seems to me that maybe in the Sun Series things are just reversed from Christianity. The Outsider is a dark God who casts sun and light gods as villains, while ours is a God of Light who casts the dark gods of paganism as villains. Is finding balance what Jesus did for our universe? Grasping at straws but...at least grasping.

Depends what you mean by "things." But achieving "balance" could be called "conciliation." Even "reconciliation."

Jordon Flato — 16 Feb 2011, 01:09 · in reply to David Stockhoff

As an aside back to what I originally posted in this topic (i.e. that maybe the Neighbors were really dream traveling inhumani) I want to make it crystal perfectly completely clear that I actually don't believe that at all. I was just so intrigued by all of the possibilities raised by everyone and the possible permutations of dream travel/soul enshrining etc etc that I couldn't resist throwing that wrench out there for the proverbial monkey works.

Continue.

James Wynn — 16 Feb 2011, 13:16 · in reply to David Stockhoff

IIRC There were tribes in which Modred was viewed as a hero. There was a story of Arthur attempting to get rid of Modred by putting him and all the infants of Britain into baskets and setting them adrift in the sea. In mythology heroes and villains trade roles almost as often as DC comic characters.

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David Stockhoff — 17 Feb 2011, 01:43 · in reply to James Wynn

Sometimes that's true. And I read today of a piece of Russian Tolkien fan fiction---a novel in which Mordor is the oppressed and the elves are the oppressor. Apparently it's not bad!

On 2/16/2011 8:16 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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