

Urth Digest, Vol 111, Issue 17

The Urth list — 14 messages, 7 voices, 01 Dec 2013

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6469>

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Andrew Mason — 01 Dec 2013, 23:01

Lee wrote:

Great question! One I think Marc would have no trouble answering as he

feels Silkhorn is fully Silk by the end. I think he is still partially Horn but ties in nicely with Andrew's recent question and Dan'l's answer.

I think there is a small amount of Horn still left in SilkHorn for Seawrack to attach to. But in regard to Andrew's question about what new love the narrator will find to fulfill the prophecy, I agree with Dan'l.

It is Seawrack.

For the Silk part of silkHorn, she is a new love. Given her spiritual connection to Hyacinth and Kypris (discussed in another post), I think Silk can find much to love in Seawrack, physical differences aside.

That's certainly possible, though it would be tricky - the 'return to your sons' native place as a stranger' bit would seem to fit only Horn, while 'find new love' can apply only to Silk. Though one might argue that Hoof and Hide are Silk's sons in a way, by adoption, since they call the Rajan 'Father' although, as becomes clear, they don't really think of him as Horn.

The Rajan says towards the end that he asked Greater Scylla how to contact the Mother, so he could find Seawrack again, but 'would never have used it while Nettle was alive'. Yet at the end, though Nettle is alive, he does use it - I would take it because he no longer sees himself as Horn and therefore no longer considers himself married to Nettle. That would support the idea that it is as Silk that he finally makes contact with Seawrack.

Regarding the Mother: at one point Horn speculates that she is in some way the same person as Scylla, but decides that she is not - they fulfil the same function, that of a water-goddess, but it makes sense to have different people doing this on different worlds. However, later events illuminate this a bit more; the Mother turns out to be in some sense the sister of Greater Scylla on Urth, and the Whorl goddess took her name from Greater Scylla, to whom she had dedicated herself. So, even without a genetic connection between the two, the link between Scylla and the Mother is not a pure coincidence. As for how the Mother and Greater Scylla can be sisters, there are some hints in *_New Sun_* that the monsters came from space - so they may either have come from Blue, or come to both Blue and Urth from their original home.

I agree that Seawrack is in some way like Juturna, but Juturna's own status is a bit unclear. At one point she insists that she is human. Greater Scylla produces images of women to speak to the Rajan and Whorl Scylla, but later he seems to say that the undines are something else: 'There are women in that river, women who swim up from the sea. I do not speak of the feignings of the sea goddess, but of real women.' I would take it that the undines are descended from women of the drowned cities, taken prisoner by the sea-monsters - so this might actually support Seawrack's story of shipwreck.

Lee — 02 Dec 2013, 14:44 · follows Andrew Mason

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We humans are locked into sexual reproduction and we consider those simple animals which can do both sexual and asexual reproduction as far beneath us. But I think Wolfe is trying to call our attention to the idea that the superhuman ancient gods could reproduce both sexually and asexually and that our prejudice on the superiority of sexual reproduction is a false bias.

I take the mythological underpinnings found in the Sun Series quite literally. Perhaps too literally, but I very much think The Mother on Blue must be a reference to Echidna, the mythological "mother of all monsters", including mother to mythological Scylla. I find the Echidna worship found in Gaon to support this. What other purpose to the story could it serve?

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In my view, Wolfe is saying, we (or the ancient) humans inaccurately put our own gender and family labels on the pantheons of ancient deities. But in reality we don't have the vocabulary or personal experience to understand the relationships that giant sexual/asexual beings would have amongst themselves.

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I find it a bit maddening that Wolfe continues to hint at this (alternate?) path to godhood, which I think might best be called the "Baldanders Path". He continued to grow from being a small man to a giant man and eventually to such a monstrosity that only the sea could support him. Wolfe seems to suggest a similar path from little Cilinia to Great Scylla. Somehow Godlings on the Whorl are meant to suggest this path also.

My best guess is that this connects to hints in the BOTNS that all the cacogens, Inire, Tzadkiel, Barbatus, Famulimus, etc. are all from original human stock who became mutated in the diaspora before returning in altered form, to Urth. I especially note the hints that Barbatus and Famulimus (and Apheta?) had a water phase in their evolution.

Apheta says she is the "larva" of Hierogrammates. Tzadkiel has a "son" named venant? What do these really mean? Like the relationship between Typhon, Echidna, Abaia and Scylla, I don't think we are meant to fully understand.

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 02 Dec 2013, 16:37 · in reply to Lee

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But seriously. Clearly sex means something big to Wolfe. It is both a blessing and a curse, is it not? It enables Love, but also stands in its way. It allows increased mutation and faster evolution through death. It is no surprise that a converted Catholic would want to consciously and logically work it all out. A-sex is so much easier, but it is a brute-force approach to life. With no need to stop and put energy into a new generation, one could live forever---but without change. It is non-iterative, noncyclical, non-individual.

Recall the old cliches of angels wanting to be mortal so they could feel love, as well as experience the fear of death. Reproduction is creation and destruction; it is the basic way we interact with the material universe. Even more basic than eating/shitting, since without birth we as individuals would do neither.

Asexual monsters do not experience the universe in this way. Whereas the gods of the Urthiverse grow forever and become huge (like Baldanders tried to do), humans experience the potential for transcendence as well as evolution. The old Earth gods did have lives and families (all made up but based on human reality, just as were the gods of the Whorl), but as immortals

they don't change, don't advance, don't evolve. Whatever powers one might gain from living forever they are nothing compared with ours. (Cue music.)

Is it any wonder sexual aliens do not often appear in Wolfe? And when they do, as in 5HC, where it is humans who are static, their "model" is hopelessly tangled and difficult to interpret. Larvae and sons are mentioned, but these cases need to be taken with a grain of salt. Seawrack is quite capable of sexuality, although almost surely without the ability to actually give birth. (Like Hy, if she is indeed male.) The Ascians reproduce sexually but have lost almost everything else through their imitation of Abaia, as far as humans can lose their humanity. And so on.

As you note, Abaia's sexuality is unclear, but all we have is a pronoun and the overtly feminine gender of his "brides," who themselves do not appear to reproduce (with whom would they?) except perhaps parthenogenetically, but they do keep growing. Unlike Seawrack.

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DAVID STOCKHOFF — 02 Dec 2013, 16:45 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

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Craig Brewer — 02 Dec 2013, 20:23 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

So when do we get to cancel the moratorium on TLA? I've read it once. Anyone else?

Oh, how I long to discuss houses, The Sorcerer's Apprentice, Peace...

Lee — 02 Dec 2013, 20:24 · follows DAVID STOCKHOFF

David Stockhoff: With no need to stop and put energy into a new generation, one could live forever---but without change. It is non-iterative, noncyclical, non-individual.

I agree, this is the clear message of 5HoC, the original novella. But in the two following sections, the dark possibility of our species being taken over by a more rapidly evolving (shape-shifting) parasite species seems to overwhelm that initial message.

I think that message is restated with the Inhumans in Short Sun but this time with a bit more hope that we might resist.

Recall the old cliches of angels wanting to be mortal so they could feel love, as well as experience the fear of death.

I think more than one Star Trek episode was devoted to that premise. One (pertinently) substituting Greek gods for angels, another, (also pertinently) an advanced race of superhuman parasitic aliens who hitch a ride and commandeer the Enterprise.

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Agreed. Tolkien recognized this as the human advantage over elves also. A consideration I don't think Gene Wolfe missed in his Tolkien fandom.

Seawrack is quite capable of sexuality, although almost surely without the ability to actually give birth.

A very good observation. And an incisive look at the way men usually view their mistresses, in contrast to their wives.

The Ascians reproduce sexually but have lost almost everything else through their imitation of Abaia, as far as humans can lose their humanity.

Asexual reproduction as an analog to human communism/socialism? Interesting thought. Will Obamacare stunt our growth as a species? (j/k)

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I think Seawrack (as a siren) was specifically grown to serve as a sexual attractant to human males.

Undines say they will continue to grow until they are able to mate with Abaia. This is almost but not quite in keeping with the most classic example of parthenogenetic reproduction, that being the phylum of Rotifers.

Rotifer females happily clone themselves over and over in good conditions. But when their environment becomes stressful they start producing both male and female offspring who mate and produce diverse offspring, some of which will survive the stress.

Perhaps this is the model Wolfe was drawing upon. Our Megatherian types bud off offspring as needed. But perhaps something stressful happened causing Typhon and Echidna to actually have sexual congress and diverse offspring. They certainly don't seem to have a relationship based on love.

As a side note, "venant" as a name apparently would mean "He Is Coming."

Which phrase calls to mind another story where a supernatural being sacrificed His only son for the sake of humanity...

Antonin Scriabin — 02 Dec 2013, 20:33 · in reply to Craig Brewer

I'm going to finish tonight, I have about 40 pages left. Definitely into Wolfe houses.

On Mon, Dec 2, 2013 at 3:23 PM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:
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Craig Brewer — 02 Dec 2013, 20:46 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

I also think that comparisons with Mieville's *The City and the City* are necessary. Whether Wolfe read that or not (anyone know?), the two are definitely similar (and interestingly opposed)?in many, many ways.

Daniel Otto Jack Petersen — 02 Dec 2013, 20:52 · in reply to Craig Brewer

City & the City's a very good conversation partner to bring in, yes! I've only read the excerpt online of Wolfe's new book but having read Mieville's I can already tell they work in shadowing each other. I recently read Wolfe's *There Are Doors* for the first time and it also is very Kafka-esque (referencing Kafka's works explicitly) and the excerpt of TLA reminded me of that earlier work as well. -DOJP

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From: Antonin Scriabin <kierkegardian at gmail.com>
To: Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com>; The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Monday, December 2, 2013 1:33 PM
Subject: Re: (urth) The Land Across moratorium?

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Possibly. Plenty of species do that, including some fish. Many species migrate in response to stress, too, though most don't hollow out an asteroid.

Also, here's a tidbit about rotifers: The animals appear to offset a loss of genetic diversity by eating any DNA floating in their environment and incorporating it into their genome.

Hmm ... so on a diet of dead sailors ... hmm ...

Antonin Scriabin — 03 Dec 2013, 13:54 · in reply to Daniel Otto Jack Petersen

All done. I **really** liked this one, and there is so much packed into its shorter length (**An Evil Guest**, **The Sorcerer's House**, and **Home Fires** are all longer) that it has me asking way more questions than I was expecting. It will be a great book to dissect on the list.

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So when do we get to cancel the moratorium on TLA? I've read it once. Anyone else?

Oh, how I long to discuss houses, The Sorcerer's Apprentice, Peace...

Gerry Quinn — 03 Dec 2013, 16:49 · in reply to Daniel Otto Jack Petersen
Last Letters from Hav is probably an early reference point for this genre.

- Gerry Quinn

From: Daniel Otto Jack Petersen
Sent: Monday, December 02, 2013 8:52 PM
To: Craig Brewer ; The Urth Mailing List
Subject: Re: (urth) The Land Across moratorium?

City & the City's a very good conversation partner to bring in, yes! I've only read the excerpt online of Wolfe's new book but having read Mieville's I can already tell they work in shadowing each other. I recently read Wolfe's There Are Doors for the first time and it also is very Kafka-esque (referencing Kafka's works explicitly) and the excerpt of TLA reminded me of that earlier work as well. -DOJP

On Mon, Dec 2, 2013 at 8:46 PM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

I also think that comparisons with Mieville's _The City and the City_ are necessary. Whether Wolfe read that or not (anyone know?), the two are definitely similar (and interestingly opposed) in many, many ways.

From: Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaurdian at gmail.com>
To: Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com>; The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Monday, December 2, 2013 1:33 PM
Subject: Re: (urth) The Land Across moratorium?

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Daniel Otto Jack Petersen

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 03 Dec 2013, 17:54 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Well, NOW you've got me interested. That's one of my all-time favorites.

On Tuesday, December 3, 2013 11:50 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

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- Gerry Quinn

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Gerry Quinn — 03 Dec 2013, 21:17 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

From: DAVID STOCKHOFF

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On Tuesday, December 3, 2013 11:50 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com>
wrote:

Last Letters from Hav is probably an early reference point for this
genre.

I enjoyed it too. But all I meant was that like _The City And The City_ it is an earlier example of a
fictional, seemingly Balkan country, albeit from a modern literary era.

Of course, thinking back further there were the Ruritania stories (Prisoner of Zenda etc.).
Though that had a more Austro-Hungarian feel, I think.

- Gerry Quinn