

Star Trek & Alien Stones

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 01 Jul 1998

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Robert Borski — 01 Jul 1998, 15:09

Have any Star Trek friends you'd like to introduce to Gene Wolfe? How about giving them "Alien Stones" to read? I see it basically as Gene Wolfe's take on the original tv series.

The Gladiator is the Enterprise, Captain Daw is Captain Kirk, and cyberneticist Polk is Dr. McCoy. In Gene's universe, however (Gene Wolfe, not Gene Roddenberry), there is no Mr. Spock, but there is a Mr. Youngmeadow (he's known by no other name) and he's the direct antithesis of Spock. Spock--a devil figure if I ever saw one, what with those pointed ears and Vulcan heritage--is as coldly logical and unemotional as a machine. Youngmeadow, on the other hand, is an empath, a lover of all cultures and peoples. He's also has the blond good looks of an angel (cf. Spock's dark saturninity), and his name 'young + meadow' recalls the verdure of the primordial Garden--as opposed to the fiery connotations of Vulcan. He is our link back to Eden and symbolizes the concept of agape--selfless and self-giving love, according to the Bible--and in the end he sacrifices himself for the betterment of mankind. He's also resurrected like Christ, further extending the agape link.

Also present on this voyage of the Gladiator/Enterprise is Youngmeadow's wife. She too is an empath, and named Helen she's as beautiful and desirable as the legendary Helen of Troy, whose face launched a 1000 ships. All the men aboard the Gladiator are in love with her ("Everyone, notoriously, fell in love with empaths"), including Daw. This love is what the Bible refers to as eros, however, or sexual love, and is obviously less pure than the agape of both Helen and her husband. Helen also brings to mind the endless succession of women James Kirk woos and beds in space.

Then there's the giant alien ship discovered by the Gladiator. (Anybody remember "The Corbomite <sp?> Maneuver" from the first incarnation of Star Trek? "Alien Stones" parallels it in many respects.) Daw, the Youngmeadows and various other crewmembers undertake an exploration of it (in part their journey through the ship's interior will resemble FANTASTIC VOYAGE), and what they eventually decide is that the entire ship may be a single giant artificial intelligence (though it obviously was built by six-fingered humanoids, if we're to accept the base 12 and symbology of the ship's mathematical system). This recalls what Wad, Daw's synthetic alter-ego, has mentioned earlier: "Mankind has reached the stage where he evolves through his machine." What Wad fails to add, however, is: "And as he does so he himself becomes more machinelike."

I believe this moving away from the organic--from the stones of the world to the abstract, whether it's the Wad pc-generated simulation or binary notation--symbolizes for Wolfe a retreat from the Edenic past, where we were closer to God. Witness Daw's magnetic copies of the New and Old Testaments; they're absent in Wad's simulation (although Wad does have the potential for empathy/agape, according to Helen Youngmeadow). Daw also avoids the use of sucking furniture to moor him while he sleeps; he's perfectly content to depend on the atavistic myoclonic response we inherited from our apelike ancestors (i.e., our arms will grip a tree limb tighter if we sense we're falling, even in sleep). As Helen mentions earlier, in regards to what

the aliens may have left behind, what betrays the heart are the things you take with you that are unnecessary. Daw could use the sucking furniture, but chooses not to. He is at heart content with what God has given him evolutionarily. Another example of this moving away from God via machines: the space suits' survival programs, which tend to a person's every metabolic need, even after death, when the flora in our intestines become the dominant organisms--another example of false or base immortality. In many respects as well the giant alien craft is little more than an asteroid sized version of one of these spacesuits.

And yet for all its Godless parameters Daw stills likes the alien ship--this embodies the last Biblical concept of love Wolfe has yet to bring in: philos, or brotherly love, and perhaps it is the most important of the three for a starship captain to have. Daw also understands the difference between eros and agape, and tries to moderate his approach to Helen Youngmeadow's desirability (recall as well the quote from the New Testament he cites about marriage in heaven). He is "Alien Stones" only complete human being, although the Youngmeadows are almost there. And while the rest of humanity may elect to forsake its bond with God by entering into congress with soulless machines, he will not.

As for the non-simulated Captain who taught Daw everything he knows, and who Daw describes as "A real captain...[and]... a crusty bastard [who] generally knew what he was doing"?

I submit he's an older, wiser James T. Kirk.

scolex/Robert Borski

Jim Jordan — 01 Jul 1998, 16:58 · follows Robert Borski

At 03:09 PM 7/1/98 -0500, you wrote:

"Helen of Troy, whose face launched a 1000 ships."

Yes. In the metric system, a minihelen is the amount of beauty necessary to launch ONE ship.

The ever-loving, potrzebieic

Jim Jordan