

solar labyrinth

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 06 Jul 1998

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Damien Broderick — 07 Jul 1998, 11:46

Further to the labyrinthine question, John Clute responds:

The sentence in question, which was certainly written by me, appears in the 1993 text form of the SFE as well. I'm [travelling and] a long way from sources, and can't for the life of me remember why I said it, beyond its seeming to be true.. Michael Andre-Driussi [...] may either be able to scotch the rumour I started, or confirm my innate and readily apparent wisdom.

Clute will be at Readercon any day now, for those of you within striking distance of Boston.
sigh

Damien Broderick

William H. Ansley — 06 Jul 1998, 22:33 · follows Damien Broderick

Damien Broderick wrote:

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Damien,

Even though the result wasn't all that informative, I want to thank you for going to the trouble of asking John Clute and Peter Nicholls about the passage I quoted to try to get an answer to my question about it.

I must also say I am impressed with the circle of your acquaintances in the SF world.

Although I am not at all surprised, it is also impressive to have one of the editors of The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction confirm that our mantis is *the* guy when it comes to settling obscure points about Gene Wolfe.

William Ansley

m.driussi — 07 Jul 1998, 05:05 · follows William H. Ansley

Well, when John Clute calls me to bat, I go.

However unready I might be.

My recollection about things being said (not by John Clute directly, mind you) regarding "A Solar Labyrinth" (ASL) and the Urth Cycle . . .

ASL has been discussed before as a sort of touchstone. (For the record, fwiw, I have never seen an interpretation like that of Robert Borski's.)

Greg Feeley mentioned ASL in his NYRSF (No. 31 and No. 32) piece. The point being that the creator is also the monster: that the roles of Daedelus and Minotaur have been collapsed into one. That mazes figure strongly in TBOTNS: the retelling of Theseus; the Autarch's mind described as a maze. (Let alone the tunnels under the citadel; the trail to Ultan; the sorcerer's maze; the labyrinth patterns on the magic mirrors; the trail to the Last House; the matachin dance itself; the maze of the ship Tzadkiel; etc.)

The last line of Feeley's essay: "Let his comment [Wolfe's introduction notes on ASL in STOREYS FROM THE OLD HOTEL, which everybody here has been quoting] stand as reminder of the helpfulness and suspect motives of Wolfe's own commentaries, and the story as a short, formal nudge: every maze holds a monster; labyrinths serve the interests of their builder."

To which I would add my favorite Urth labyrinth tidbits: how the Old Autarch has the aspect of a bull (or is that "bull-headed man"?) in the corridors of time (and how this links to the calendar stories "To the Dark Tower Came" and "At the Point of Capricorn"); how Severian must kill him, even though it is by the Old Autarch's desire and command, still he stands in the minotaur/navisaput position; how Father Inire, as Daedelus of Urth, has a fondness for children (pre-pubescent girls) which makes him like Lewis Carroll on the nice side and the maze maker/monster of ASL on the nasty side (this is part of the common touchstone I remember people talking about).

For what it is worth, ASL probably forms a part of a cycle of stories about the Urth Cycle which are not of the Urth Cycle. We could add "The Sailor Who Sailed After the Sun," cued by the title and certain elements of the story. There are others--Joan Gordon's book says that "Four Wolves" (see note below) "may be about the writing of TBOTNS"; "The God and His Man" "might be an allegory of the Urth."

(Note: "Four Wolves" in "Amazing" [5/83] = short shorts: "At the Volcano's Lip," "In the Mountains," "My Book," and "The River." The last of which can be found nowhere else, to the best of my knowledge.)

(Joan Gordon's book says that ASL is "a Borgesian maze.")

A very poor showing if I'm to say yea or nay to John Clute's snappy note regarding ASL as being a metafiction of TBOTNS. I mean, I say, "Yea!" since it was a touchstone that was in use; I understood it intuitively and agreed with it; but have a hard time defending it beyond the vague way that I present above.

=mantis=