

# Digest urth.v002.n020

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 12 Jul 1997

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Alice Turner — 12 Jul 1997, 10:46

cephalo-

I'm inclined not to blame the starship crew at all, or to look for a flaw or sin. After all, if you go along with the old dicta, you'll note that wickedness preys on innocence. Faust preys on Gretchen, the coven on Rosemary, Satan not on a wicked witch but on a virgin to bear the Antichrist. Expedience is all, and part of the thrill for the audience is what cynical TV producers call WomJep, the hoary formula of placing a woman in mortal jeopardy.

Although you could say that they have committed the PC crime of kidnapping a creature from its natural habitat, and therefore deserve what's coming.

The unpleasantness in Wolfe's worlds comes from the Fallen state of the world's inhabitants, not an outside metaphysical force. Typhon is not the anti-Outsider. Even Erebus and Abia don't strike me as being stand-ins for Satan (although I could be wrong. I read them as just having very different goals from humanity... being adversaries, not The Adversary).

That's interestingly put, and I think you're right. But you're talking about long and thoughtful works, whereas "Hues" is...well, I think "pulp" covers it. Let's see what he does with the inhumani. Already, we have found one of them to have an extremely complex character, but he may not be at all representative.

A word of the Antichrist/anti-Messiah distinction: Hasn't the Catholic church declared people to be antichrists over the years? Really out-of-line popes, and people like that? I think the term pretty much applies to anyone whose goals are the opposite of Christ's. Thanks to the whole sub-genre of horror movies that followed Rosemary, I think it's well-established to think of a demonically possessed unborn baby as the/a antichrist.

I think you're probably thinking of the Reformation's tack that all popes---the papacy itself---represented the antichrist. Printing was well established by that time (the internet of its day!) and hundreds of monographs, cartoons and drawings----scurrilous, obscene and frequently coarsely funny---to that effect were circulated all over Protestant-leaning Europe. Islam was not attacked the same way; the antichrist is always understood to arise within Christianity. The horror movies, no matter how debased, follow the tradition.

My favorite line from this story is Kyle's response to Skips question "Do you have a soul?":

"...I've seen a printout, though of course I didn't read it all; it was very long."

That wonderful exchange almost makes the story worthwhile!

-alga-

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Ron Crown, St. Louis University — 13 Jul 1997, 14:02 · follows Alice Turner

FWIW, "All the Hues of Hell" (1987) reminds me a great deal of three other Wolfe starship tales: "Alien Stones" (1972), "Silhouette" (1975), and "The Other Dead Man" (1988).

Mantis, would you mind expanding on this a little bit? "Alien Stones" strikes me as more genuinely hard sf than is usual for Wolfe (and would fit more appropriately, IMHO, in *The Ascent of Wonder* than either "Hues" or "Procreation." As I see it, "Stones" is Wolfe's version of a Big Dumb Object story, some of the secrets of which are discovered by the grizzled space captain by the application of observation and logic (ironically contrasted with the inability of the young "empath" to figure out what is going on). There is a typical Wolfe riff on human/machine identity (is Daw or Wad the computer simulation?) but the fact that I wasn't sure which was which didn't interfere with my ability to enjoy the story.

"Dead Man" is the Wolfe identity conundrum, ghost-story-in-outer-space version and "Silhouette" I confess not to fully understand. (are the silhouettes aliens or imaginary? How does the protagonist figure out that the captain is the leader of the mutiny, or is he? Why do all the characters have Germanic names?, etc. etc. etc) Any thoughts?

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What you say is absolutely true and underscores the distinction I want to make between "antichrist" and some type of demonic or supernatural being. Most, if not all "antichrists" in history from the king of Babylon to Saddam Hussein (hey, how's that for closing the circle!) have been human beings. True, they were seen as "demonic" (but note the use of quotations). In "Hues," we're clearly dealing with some type of otherworldly being and *that's* why I was opposed to the antichrist motif. Just call me pedantic :).

Here's something interesting (and even somewhat relevant to the topic). The name "Lucifer" first appears in the Bible as a translation of the Greek "phosphoros" (they both mean "bearer of light"), which was in turn a translation of the Hebrew *helel* meaning "bright shiner." It's used in the book of Isaiah re the king of Babylon (not the devil). The passage uses an astronomically-based myth of the (failed) attempt of Venus in its morning star version to usurp the throne, as it were, of the sun. As Venus is to the sun, so the king of Babylon is to Yahweh.

Now, do you know what the Aztecs called Venus? Quetzalcoat! And now back to WHORL....

Ron Crown  
crownrw at slu.edu