

Quibbles "R" Us

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 04 Apr 1997

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m.driussi — 04 Apr 1997, 00:08

Reply: Item #4863076 from WHORL at LISTS.BEST.COM@INTERNET#

Nutria,

(Glad to see a message here--especially one as well informed as your own <g>--it has been so quiet . . . taxes, everyone?)

Re: posthistory of Urth. Right, so get cracking on your version! (Sometimes I wonder if I should have followed the manvantara scheme a little more closely--after all, the fourth yuga is just a tad over one chiliad . . . in "god years" . . .)

Yes, intergalactic travel is mentioned at least one other time as well; and yes, at near-light speeds this would require tremendous amounts of objective time; and in addition it appears that Monarch Typhon was just able to launch the Whorl as a monumental feat of daring do, yet it is also sub-light capable; however, we must not forget about Yesod (in its aspect of hyperspace), and at that point where we are talking about travel to other galaxies, I for one assume that hyperspace must be in use by that point, if not considerably earlier. (And gee, in most future histories ftl is invented sometime next week, except in those cases where we've already passed it by! <g> Which is just to say that the development of ftl drive doesn't usually take millions of years in the traditions of sf--what was Cordwainer Smith's version? Space-3? Something like that.)

Of course, if my guess is true that Yesod-time flows in the opposite direction that Briah-time flows, then things get =very= interesting at the end of those long galaxy hops! Happily, local causality is preserved, paradox free, since the travellers are equally distant in space as well as time.

Re: river city turning into fossil mountain, yes, all good points, but you stopped too soon! You built it into a mountain but forgot to have half of it fall away. That takes some more time . . . suggests that the magma, at some point after pushing the fossilopolis up a league or two (but hey, the city stratum seems to be most of a league through, doesn't it?) then ebbs (for mysterious reasons not covered by "natural geological evolution as we know it," which for me is always a cue for suspecting terraforming as the cause) to the point that Severian can say that there are no volcanos on Urth (truly a dead world at that point--no earthquakes, perhaps no magnetic field, no pre-industrial greenhouse gases, etc.). So that takes time, too; how long between the raising of fossilopolis and the entropic ebb of magma?

I'm not an archeologist, but aren't the "tells" of Mesopotamia the hill-like remains of ancient cities? That is, yes, the sands bury the Sphinx in a sandy place, but in other places things seem to simultaneously melt like candles and rise like cake in the oven. (Sometimes, no doubt, because next civilization builds a new city directly on top of the old ruins. All the versions of Troy, for example. Which works out because all cities want to be on a hill, anyway, for defense

and prestige.)

I'm not an astronomer, but the reddening of the sun implies, as you say, a very long time . . . billions of years, I believe, if we are talking natural stellar evolution. However, in my reading of TBOTNS it is quite clear that the dying sun is a victim of unnatural events--the introduction of a black hole into the solar core. The text on this point is clear. Beyond that and into the whys and wherefores is all speculation (of course I have my theories! Again, basically terraforming--in this case, stellaforming). But we cannot use stellar evolution as a benchmark in this case, I'm afraid. (Another problem: a naturally dying red sun would have already gone through a long giant phase wherein it would have vaporized the inner worlds--talk about the History Eraser Button!)

Re: scarabs, yes, I thought you would link the scarabs of Silk's vision to the ones Severian sees in Yesod, since your interview of Wolfe mentions Yesod's scarabs and I'd never noticed them before. And I do think they form a strong link, fwiw. (But, just to quibble with you, the Yesod scarabs merely "clambered like ants" [V, ch. 22, p. 163 or last line of chapter]--they don't seem to be pushing anything, dung or stars. Your interpretation is a very good one, and I myself believe it and commend you for it, but when it comes down to the text, it isn't entirely supported . . . or maybe I'm just looking in the wrong place?)

Re: "Chrasmmological" as Greek for oracular speech. Of course I agree with you and share your degree of nearly metaphysical certitude . . . I guess it boils down to transliteration of the "epsilon" in khi-rho-epsilon-sigma-mu-omicron-sigma.

Re: elements of the Outsider (and/or the enlightenment he gives Silk) that seem strongly linked to Jesus Christ. In Q&D I listed (under "the Outsider") many of the ones you mentioned, but I also wonder how many of them are elements of the Sacred King pattern which pre-dates the life and times of Jesus (Machiavellians can say that the glass is empty, that Jesus manipulated the masses with old symbols from diverse and hoary sources; the more spiritually inclined can say that the glass is overflowing, that the transcendent god had been putting these symbols in place [and continues to do so] in preparation for the Christ).

But nevermind that--all those things are very clearly Christian. What I want your opinion on is the allusion to the moneylenders: Wolfe as Horn writes that Silk says, "the Outsider was known to esteem [the sellers] last among men already--that according to the Writings he had once (having possessed and enlightened a fortunate man) beaten them severely in person" (I, 17).

What strikes me about this offhand passage is first, and rather superficially, that this is a clear link to Biblical text on Jesus Christ; second, the more haunting/puzzling part, is what is being said here: that Jesus was "possessed and enlightened" by the Outsider. While I'm not by any means a theologian, it is my understanding that this scenario is not acceptable to any of the main branches of modern day Christianity (mainly because it seems to deny the divine part of Jesus, the "theo" of theanthropos)--it is, however, an official element of both Gnosticism (some branches, at least [hedge]) and Islam, both of which go on to claim (basically) that a mortal substitute died on the cross in the place of Jesus (i.e., the old tanist tradition again, but that is a tangent too far). And "enlightenment" is, of course, not really a term traditionally used in Occidental religion--it is, most specifically, a term used in referring to the Buddha (who was born a prince, yes; but not part God). I've read a certain amount of material about the Buddha, but I don't recall a part where Buddha gives merchants or moneylenders a beating.

So, what do we make of this? It is in reference to the Writings.

Are we to infer that this deviation of Christian interpretation is a marker to show the reader how "wrong" (corrupted, twisted, perverted) the Chrasmolologic Writings are; or how Gnostic/Islamic (not necessarily "wrong") they are; or "something else again" (which is a close translation of the name "Baldanders," according to Borges!).

=mantis=

Questions or problems to whorl-owner at lists.best.com

Fernando Q. Gouvea — 04 Apr 1997, 08:09 · follows m.driussi

**** On Fri, 4 Apr 97 00:08:00 GMT, Mantis said:

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The hedge is correct, as far as Gnosticism. There are other words that come to mind too: "adoptionism", for example, and other kinds of "low Christology".

M> which go on to claim (basically) that a mortal substitute died on the M> cross in the place of Jesus (i.e., the old tanist tradition again, but M> that is a tangent too far).

You are certainly right that (for orthodox Christians) "possessed and enlightened" is far too weak a description of the incarnation. (Unfortunately, there are far too many Christians who would find it perfectly ok, but that's another story.) But in the context of the story, it seems right: Silk's "theology" doesn't seem to be able to accomodate such a concept as a true incarnation, so how else is he to grasp the idea? "Possessed" is not a Christian concept at all, except in the negative sense---demons possess people, God enlightens, inspires, and in one case becomes incarnate. But Silk's gods *do* possess people, in fact they seem to do that far more often than they enlighten them.

So my reaction is that we shouldn't read too much into this expression. It makes sense to me that within Silk's context it's the closest he can get to the idea of incarnation, and hence (presumably) that this is the doctrine he knows. By the way, does he know about the cleansing of the temple from the Writings or from his illumination? If the latter, then it's even more natural that his understanding of it isn't yet complete (since this mention, if I remember right, is early in Nightside).

(Hmmm, I suppose I've got to come up with a Vironese name... I'm Quill's father, so I need something related to that. Anybody have a suggestion?)

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There are certain things men must do to remain men.

-- Kirk, "The Ultimate Computer", stardate 4929.4

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