

Unapplied Semantics

a literary blog series by Ken. R. Maxwell.

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Paper Back Wisdom Setting the Frame work for “Warhammer 40k”

Mass media paper back novels typically are, hence the name, mass produced by an, or a group of authors revolving around a core set of fictional mythologies. These mythologies are often ignored, or overlooked in mass media paper back novels because it is perceived as “fluff” (non-essential source material to the form of entertainment, whether it be novels, or video games). This fluff is often ignored because it is seen as secondary, or even precluding the true form of enjoyment in the game. Many people enjoy absorbing the fluff as fans of literature, or mythology in general, yet the general accepted attitude on the “inter webs” is that it is mindless, and devoid of any value outside of the context of the fictional “universe” of media.

One of my favourite, guilty pleasures is Warhammer 40k. A science fiction table top war strategy game designed by a company called GamesWorkshop. This fictional universe spans a range of media forms; the hobby of painting, and constructing miniatures, video games, animated movies, comic books, and novels. The novels are extensive and are published under GamesWorkshops “certified” publishing house “The Black Library” based out of the UK. They’ve gathered a coterie of successful, and established science fiction authors to produce these novels at a very quick pace. The breath of the novels is so large that it has been divided among the different armies of the tabletop game, different “time periods” of the fictional history of the universe, and by specific series of novels, ie. “Battle books” are forms of these novels written purely to describe and present a singular “epic” battle in the history of the universe.

It is easy for the diehard fans of the table top

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game to dismiss these novels and nothing more than fluff for their gaming experience, yet the novels themselves (especially one sub-series called the “Horus Heresy Series”) I would argue deals with far more than setting the frame work for battling with your miniatures on the table top, or playing your favourite video game version of the game. These novels have usurped



Technology and faith.

the boundaries of being mere fluff, and border, or I would argue, are art outright. Hidden within the stories of amazing superhuman heroes of the 41st millennium AD are clever bits of allegory for contemporary times. The most prominent, or the first one the authors throw at the audience, in the Horus Heresy is the concept of a world founded on rational, secular logic which scorns concepts such as faith, superstition, or religion altogether. This is an interesting jumping off point for supposedly mindless fictional mythology to touch in a time where the world seems to be divided between fanatics of scientific, and fanatics of religious belief.

Beyond being interesting however, the novels quickly become a form of allegory for modern times. The “Emperor of Mankind”, a mythic which represents the figure head of scientific reason, we can see as the ideology behind the age of scientific rationality. A model of pragmatism which scorns limiting our lives and freedoms as human beings to archaic, or dated modes of understanding the universe. He disdain the concept of a god, or gods and sets out to first cast out every church and religious organization on Earth and eventually every human colony across space as his unites humanity in a great crusade. The fiction presents this as the story of the “good guys”, a very relatable concept for a middle class guy raised in a heavily capitalist and logic driver society. However the fiction challenges this view as it not only presents the concept that human

perception is incapable of truly understanding divinity, but that the Emperor himself in all his superhuman glory, can be labelled a god through relative logic alone. An interesting concept if you think relatively, because as computers get smarter, as the idea of artificial intelligence becomes more tangible in reality year after year; it becomes more difficult, even for people over exposed to technology, to think of these things in non-mythic terms. If we are merely human, and these things are so much more powerful than us, what is to say they may as well be considered gods, and revered religiously? What then do we do about the dilemma of a concept like faith in such a world of logic, and relativity? The answer is not clear, because this is where the novels are pure allegory for the seemingly halted state of scientific reason in the world. Nothing we have discovered, nothing we have proved outright disproves the existence of a “higher power”, like the characters in these novels the human race faces a struggle of conceptualizing faith, and belief (arguably ancient, and perhaps essential to our human psyche).

We’ll go into detail for each point, and discuss the events of a specific book in the series next time, but perhaps now you can suddenly see how a bunch of “fluff”, seemingly worthless literature, is presenting a very accurate, and contemporary form of allegory addressing current struggle in humanity.

Lorgar’s Disenfranchisement and the modern Faith/Secularism schism



“True Education comes from all who realize their affect upon others well into the future” – N. Haldeman '03 (Quote from “Invest in Technology” bridge on SAIT campus.

On May 14th 1948 the Western powers were struggling to relocate the masses of displaced Jewish peoples from the effects of the Nazi’s, and other groups, during World War II. When the British parliament voted on whether or not a strip of land in the region of Palestine should be used to settle these peoples there was only one abstaining vote; the single Jewish member of parliament. The idea was that the area around, and the city of Jerusalem itself was the historical “promised” land of the Jewish people, and the main focus of the political efforts of the Zionist movement as well at the time. In truth depending on your interpretation of the Old Testament the promised land of the Jewish people may very well be in Sinai, Saudi Arabia. Obviously the government of Saudi Arabia, or more importantly the ruling ‘oil barons’ at the time did not want to take in an influx of

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refuges, so the next logical choice was made for where to settle the people. On the aforementioned date in history, the most “progressive”, scientifically based and founded nations in the world all agreed to violate their own constitutional beliefs by founding a nation based on a religious doctrine. If you revel in scientific enlightenment it is easy to see this as a gross violation of what such nations should stand for on a global scale. It is also began what could be identified as a modern schism of secularism and faith across the world. Nations founded on so called reasonable, secular, and therefore scientific, fact based, doctrines condoned and created an atmosphere in the world that was tolerant of faith-based nations, despite the obvious irony in such an act. This is why, today in history we cannot condone the acts of a ‘nation’ like ISIS, we are the ones who set the foundation in the modern times for them to justifiably found nations based on their own religious doctrines; the secular world birthed the contemporary concept of a faith based nation.

Likewise in the “Horus Heresy” series it is

from within the boundaries of this futuristic, galaxy spanning, secular “Imperium”. The Emperor’s vision of his empire was one of purely secular nature. As I mentioned in a previous post there are stories within the Horus Heresy that describe the forces of the Emperor uniting all of Earth, and its warring continental tyrants, under his banner. Most notable of these stories is the short story written by Graham McNeill called “The Last Church”. McNeill himself perhaps sums up the goal of writing this story best in saying that it is supposed to be a more thoughtful pace of writing compared to the more action/combat orientated pace of the series, and that; “One of the aspects of the Heresy I’ve liked the most has been the dichotomy between a growing secular empire butting heads with humanity’s urge to worship things in the sky. I saw this story as a challenge to myself, the readers and to BL.” link. In this story the Emperor discusses the fate of faith in humanity’s destiny with an old priest named Uriah, who posits the idea that once he removes all forms of known faith from the world/worlds, what will stop him from having people make the logical leap of thought to assuming such a human being as the “Emperor” could be divine himself? The Emperor has no answer in the story, and as it happens in the plot of the series, no answer for his wayward sons who began to see the “Imperial Truth”, not as the secular dream of their father, but as a truth in that their father lied to them.

Faith does exist, and when they reached the end of the galaxy one of the “Chapters” of Space Marines, lead by one of the Emperor’s genetically created ‘sons’, known as a Primarch, and by the name of Lorgar Aurelian. The faction is called the “Word Bearers” and without going into too much detail it should be obvious for anyone from a western, Christian influenced nation to see the imagery in such a name. They originally called themselves that because the Emperor saw them, and his son especially as a great orator, capable of preaching the secular truth of the Imperium to the disillusioned, and often pagan/barbaric inhabitants of the worlds across the galaxy they encounter during an event preceding the ‘heresy’ called the “Great Crusade”. During the Great Crusade however Lorgar became unable to see his father as anything other than divine for the power of change he enacted upon the human race, perhaps for the better. He built massive cathedrals, and wrote volume upon volume expounding this “truth” to the

people of his home world. And the name of the “Word Bearers” became extremely non-secular over-night. The Emperor enraged by his sons actions sent another one of his sons, Robute Guilman (the arguably most logical/secular of them all) to censor and punish Lorgar. Lorgar watched as his father turned on him, apparently ignoring his own divinity, and set in motion acts to destroy every cathedral, to burn every word of Lorgar’s ‘truth’. This obviously does not sit well with Lorgar, and to a large extent he feels as if he has been chastised for doing what was only a logical conclusion.

Eventually Lorgar’s faction reaches the edge of the known galaxy and runs out of world to bring into the fold of Imperium, ending up on a planet known as Davin. On Davin the inhabitants worship a form of primordial gods that inhabit the realm of another parallel dimension. Immensely powerful creatures that can manipulate emotions, and the fabric of reality with nothing more than their own mind’s powers, it becomes easy to see how Lorgar could only accept that his father had lied; there are gods, and they dwarf the Emperor’s

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(his father’s) vain attempts at playing god. This sort of disenfranchisement could be viewed as a possible explanation for the fanatical nature of violent extremists in the world. Simply put they feel betrayed by the promise of progress the west preaches, and what their respective nations have actually received, ie. A nation like Afghanistan, still arguably war torn despite the promise of the US military especially to train forces to take over and consolidate power in the region after their departure, sort of like how the Emperor departs from the “Great Crusade” in person leaving his sons to their own devices, and revelations like Lorgar’s.

A light-hearted break Goosebumps movie!



Light one of these, and pull up a comfortable chair, its time for some "Ghost Stories"

Don't worry dear reader I'm not going soft on you, and they'll be plenty more Warhammer 40k Talk in the days ahead, but figured take a break this week from all the heavy topic matters of the first few posts to talk about a form of mass

"These little paper back novels were more than just cool scary stories, they were tales youths could relate to while reading"

media paper back writing a lot more people may be familiar.

A major development in the mass media paper back novels of my youth was recently announced in the form of major motion picture set around the Goosebumps books written by R.L. Stine. The books themselves, and the sub-

sequent television show, were a huge thing for myself at least over a decade ago now. These books told stories of kids around my age, discovering that the "evils" from popular media, like werewolves and ghosts were in fact real. The stories, were fairly scary back in the day, but also provided a real world allegory for dealing with the overwhelming challenges of coming of age, and dealing with social situations in high school. The transformation into a werewolf for one poor teen, quickly became allegory for trying to hide that uni-brow my developing body was forcing on me, or else everyone would surely know what a monster I was. Looking back its hard not to find these "issues" laughable as the folly of youth, but that was a serious concern of mine at that age.

These little paper back novels were more than just cool scary stories, they were tales youths could relate to while reading, and express their own insecurities onto the pages of. The bravery the

characters used to confront their other worldly threats in the novels became inspiration for me in life to deal with my own, no matter how terrifying they were at the time.

It is exciting to see them finally become a motion picture, espe-

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cially with the likes of a comedian like Jack Black, it only leaves me wondering how hilarious his role will be, and how entertaining the movies will be as they celebrate a great author, and the nostalgia of my generation's childhood.

[Here's the trailer](#) (All rights reserved, Sony Pictures 2015)

It's a Halloween theme hi-jacking! The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde



The Battle between light and dark.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was first published in 1886 by Robert Louise Stevenson. The novella tells the story, if you don't know of it already, of a doctor who wanting to experience the vices he dreams of indulging in. Dr. Jekyll creates a potion that transforms him from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde. Mr. Hyde is a version of Jekyll free from inhibitions or social conventions such as decency. This altered form of Jekyll has free reigns over the nights of his own life pursuing these vices Jekyll fantasized about freely, which often arouses suspicion and concern from those around Jekyll. Jekyll relations assume that Hyde is a beneficiary or a thug working for his inheritance but never for a moment they are the same. It is not until they discovered Hyde's body wearing Jekyll's clothes with a note explaining it. Jekyll ran out of components and time as the personality of Hyde gradually worked its way to the forefront of his conscious mind, eventually turning Jekyll into the monster without the potion, or Jekyll's control. Knowing that Hyde would eventually be arrested for a murder, or commit suicide Jekyll writes the note his

relations eventually find, and the novella ends with the last line of its explanation "I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end."

The novella itself is what you could consider one of the early "modern" mass produced, and mainstream paper back novels ever created. It fits the mold of books

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I've covered so far to the extent that shops in the US wouldn't sell it until the Times magazine had produced a review of it praising its worth. From there it went on to become immediately popular, and over the years more than a cult following has formed spanning into movies (many version of the book itself, and also in forms like the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen), video games (infamous NES game), and as a cliché set piece of the Halloween/horror genre in

general.

It goes without saying that this novella and its concept is ripe for allegorical assessment on many levels. From the cultural/societal point of view I focus on it is most basically a story about the duality of the individual. Perhaps as well touching on the idea of society being a corrupting influence in people's lives. Going back on my ideas to do with the Warhammer novels it is very reminiscent of the concept of Chaos and how it works to corrupt people/places in the plot line. This concept of the duality of good and evil within every human being obviously has Christian influence but for the time was a fairly new idea that hadn't been explored too thoroughly in popular media. Like Satan, or Lorgar we get a horribly "evil" character, but one that is explainable or at least understandable from a human point of view. Whether or not we are wrong or right is irrelevant for these characters, they are largely guiltless as victims of their societies and circumstance.

It is also one hell of a good, quick, and Halloween themed read if you have never checked it out.

