

Questions Keep Questing

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 Jul 1998

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m.driussi — 20 Jul 1998, 04:11

Adam,

FWIW I didn't take your post in a querulous mode. And I'm glad that something I wrote seemed clear and enlightening, but of course I was only shooting in the dark and I can't hope to hit a homer every time, even if it is a room full of ancient Greek poets who are blind, just to mix metaphors (and this one is for raster--don't think I didn't laugh on that homer quip).

I'm comfortable with the paradoxes I hold in suspension on this one. If I can continue to explain what I see, maybe you can see it even if you don't particularly believe it.

The Peter Principle is about the triumph of mediocrity, I think.

Il Principe is Machiavelli's work about amoral statecraft.

Peter Wright's papers on the "Fictions of the New Sun" provide a Machiavellian reading (which, in turn, makes Severian's narrative much closer to Herbert's DUNE series than Tolkien's LOTR).

"Sirens of Titan" is another good touchstone and I'm glad you brought it up. This is the "sarcastic" or "cosmic joke" answer to the Big Question, and I think we can all agree that it isn't an overwhelmingly fitting solution to the Briah/Yesod situation.

Some of your questions can be answered: The situation facing Severian rides a tightrope between free-will and pre-destination.

This by itself is a huge topic. Philosophy, physics, metaphysics, etc.

In practical terms, we rejoice that Severian took the brown book, rather than Canog's Book of the New Sun, because this "opens the loop" and makes the oracular power of the tales work their magic on Severian, which then helps him behave in a certain way, which is then faithfully recorded as Canog's Book of the New Sun. If Severian had taken Canog's, it would have been a closed loop "blueprint"; Severian would have been reduced to being a robot--and maybe would have resisted doing it, and the whole thing would collapse.

Likewise, nobody with any authority and/or knowledge could ever "tell Severian the truth" or "what to do" or anything like that. For the same reason. They tell him just enough and just in time. He has to be guided to the right decision, but he cannot be simply told, nor forced to do something.

Maybe we could liken it to developing a photograph: it is done in the dark, by mysterious rituals and formula, but there is a goal in mind and it begins to materialize until finally it is done and we can turn on the light and see it clearly.

As for why does Yesod care. Well, one model is that Briah and Yesod are two halves of the same creature--one is male and one is female, to use the crudest analogy. They must have an exchange of information to ensure their own future survival: Urth gets a New Sun, and Yesod gets the next stage closer to Hieros . . . who will then make hierogrammates. It all is a reproductive rite; as if homo sapiens were to guide australopithecus toward becoming homo erectus, so that homo erectus would give way to homo sapiens.

Which brings us to another dicotomy: the breaking of the human experience into Pure Order and the wild things. Cyriaca's tale of posthistory tells us that the First Empire was founded upon the one (Order) and brought down by the rejected other (non-order). The implication being (I think) that there should be a balance, within the individual and within the culture.

Not to be "zen" about it, nor too smug, but questions about the very mysterious first half of URTH should not be focused entirely in the "logical" or "rational" mode. If Order leads to brick walls of confusion, see if Non-order can lead to a doorway. If "modern science" can't answer, try "cave painting poetry" instead.

If you haven't already, you really should read Wright's essays. You might find that they fit you like a tee.

=mantis=