

ding ding! Adam & Eve, round two

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 05 Sep 1998

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Tony Ellis — 05 Sep 1998, 16:22

For starters, can we throw this curious suggestion that the naked couple are the descendants of the sailors right out of the ring, please? If the sailors had -won- the battle with Severian's memories their children would have inherited the future. They didn't win. They lost.

It is the essence of the new world Severian represents that it can only be born out of the death of the old one. It makes no sense that this new world should be populated by the very people who fought to prevent it, and every sense that it should be populated by the one man who is supposed to be the avatar of humanity's hope for the future.

Where exactly does Severian say, or even suggest, that the sailors got to populate the new world? When he says "it was simple enough to guess who my priest's forbears had been - the sailors routed by my memories" the sentence doesn't stop there, folks. It carries on without so much as a comma to say that the sailors "...had paid for their defeat with their pasts". So who were the forbears? Well, Sev's not done yet, he's just building up a little suspense. He goes on to run the words "my descendants" past us to see if anyone notices, and I repeat my point that "my descendants" really doesn't admit of that many interpretations. It certainly doesn't mean "all the creatures of Ushas", as has been suggested (apart from anything else, that would make the whole sentence nonsensical).

Jon Camfield wrote:

However, Sev never mentioned having any children, By Valeria or otherwise, and as Apheta wasn't human I doubt that that would be the source

I'm not so sure. Until they attain the exalted state of their creators, Apheta tells Severian, she and her kind must go masked "with the appearance of your own race". They are, therefore, as human as the Hierogrammates want them to be, and there is no reason why that shouldn't include the ability to conceive human children. Her explanation to Gunnie that "your race and ours are, perhaps, no more than each other's reproductive mechanisms" might even be said to reinforce this. She's speaking metaphorically, of course, but sometimes with Wolfe what is true metaphorically is also true actually.

Mantis wrote:

I thought the "thing born" was something larger, more obvious, with a more direct/literal connection to Severian in the text (i.e., another "myself"), and with more presence throughout the five books . . . the white fountain.

J. Schutlz concurs:

...Sev always refers to the white fountain
coursing through space as a second and sentient self.

And I don't disagree with either of them. I think the "thing born" is the White Fountain too. I just don't think that's -all- it is.

The White Fountain is the New Sun is the meta-symbol of TBOTNS, and it has many different and simultaneous layers of meaning. It's a star, it's the person who's going to bring the star,

and among other things it's a symbol for the birth of a new world and a new people. It seems to me that if Wolfe had wanted to suggest the creation of the white fountain -without- also suggesting the physical creation of a new race, there were any number of ways he could have done it.

Then again, there are several moments in the books where Severian muses that the literal meaning of a thing, rather than the metaphorical meaning, is the most important - or even that they are one and the same. We shouldn't just look at this union symbolically. Stars are not actually made by two people screwing. On the other, it is how babies get made. Yes, Severian has had sex before, but this is the -only- time where we're also told that the woman is "ready to mate". Now, why prime us with that particular piece of information, I wonder?

I'm also struck by what Apheta tells Severian just before the battle. "You and your world are of importance to no one here." <long pause> "Except to me. ...and that only since you have come." Maybe it's just because she likes him, but this could also be interpreted as meaning that she now has a very personal stake in Severian's success.