

Stephanides, Questor

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 Feb 1999

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m.driussi — 09 Feb 1999, 19:30

I've finally gotten around to answering the questions of Adam Stephanides, briefly and lamely. Since I had promised to post them, here, before I attempted to answer them, I might as well give you the whole thing now, after the fact (more fun for you, that way, I suppose!):

Adam said:

"I'd like to see you expand on the cryptic remark . . . that the real time of the books is always a decade or so ahead of the apparent time"

Question 1: "You say `Severian must not have a heir, as evidenced by dialog on Yesod regarding his immediate predecessor's unsexing' (AE&3, p. 14). But, at least in the passage I found, the reason the old Autarch was `unmanned' was so that Severian, who was intended all along to be the New Sun, will succeed him (V, ch. 21). This consideration doesn't apply in regards to possible heirs of Severian, since Severian's successor, if he were to have one, would be irrelevant to the Hierogrammates' cosmic plan, which stops with Severian."

Question 2: "I remain an agnostic about the existence of Severian1, as I said on the Urth list. But if he did exist, and did go to Yesod, take the test and fail, why did he fail? We are told that Severian's `examination' consisted of Tzadkiel's examining the future and determining that Severian had a good chance of bringing the New Sun. Why would Sev1 have been less likely than Sev2 to succeed in bringing the New Sun? Sev2's `optimizing' made him more compassionate, but I don't see why that would have made him more likely to bring the New Sun; if anything, it would be the reverse. The only possibility that comes to mind is that Sev1's eidolons refused to defend him in the battle royal and so he lost, or that Tzadkiel saw this would happen. This in turn would imply that our Severian's battle royal could indeed have stopped the New Sun, and was not just another torment those lovable Hierogrammates cooked up for Severian."

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To which I said:

You ask about how I divined this notion that the "real time of the books is always a decade or so ahead of the apparent time." Very briefly: it seems to me that in studying TBOTNS as a time-travel story, we first sense that the past (in general) is operating on the situation in a passive way via myths/legends, and the far-future is operating in an active way via the two time travelers Green and Ash; but then there is the very active meddling by O, B, & F, who come from the near-future--from Severian's court.

It seems like there is a "horizon" in time, a line beyond which all meddling is impossible--otherwise, it seems to me, we would have a situation where either the issue is forever contested and never resolved, or the timeline splinters into a separate universe for each and every case (so there is an Ash universe and a Green Man

universe and a universe where Baldanders becomes autarch . . . and so on, the parallel universe deal). [Which goes against the grain of my] Defining Abaddon/Briah/Yesod as subspace/normal space/hyperspace, rather than a Moorcockian multiverse of alternate Earths [which is closer to the parallel universe model].

The horizon, where is it, what is it? Obviously the key event is the arrival of the white fountain. But before that, the white fountain has to decelerate, or begin deceleration. And before =that= it has to accelerate; and before =that= it has to be born.

This line of thinking gets very wooly very quickly.

At a more human-scale, one possible horizon seems to be the tenth year of Severian's reign, when Severian gets on the Ship and literally goes over the horizon with regard to the Briatic universe. This is also roughly the period that O, B, & F come from, since they are on the Ship coming to investigate Severian after (or during, or before?) his Trial. Again, that whole loop-the-loop deal: time travel creates an inversion of causality which in turn causes weird predestination echoes. But things on the Ship can only effect the near-past by way of O, B, & F, it seems to me. Because the Ship is, in effect, its own contained universe, it forms a horizon between Briah and Yesod.

And at some point in URTH Severian is more independent and less acted upon by others; at some point Severian is triggering events rather than being raised up by the ripples of events triggered by others/other selves. This gives me a sense that the zero point, the "real now" has passed beyond the horizon. Or something like that. And when he runs up to Ushas, that's where he stops--the real now.

In short, there's no real reason why I think what I do!

As for your "real" questions regarding Severian's heir, and the existence of Sev1--have you read Peter Wright's essays in "Foundation" no. 66? Whether you agree with them or not, they might help you solidify your own opinions.

Otherwise and even if, it is another two cans of worms. In the first case, it may be that Severian cannot have an heir because, deep down, while he is capable of destroying the world in a rage over his "faithless" wife, he would fail to destroy the world if he had a child alive in it. That is, a "paternal instinct" in Severian might trump his "misogynistic impulse."

In the second case, who is the Severian in Yesod, who takes the test and triggers the mission of O, B, & F? If you want to say, "the same Severian, just in the near future," that is fine. But we know, as "our" Severian knows, that he has been guided/manipulated/instructed by time-travelers--that he is not a "natural" Severian; and thus, or so it seems to me, before "our" Severian there was a natural Severian (not guided/not manipulated/not instructed), who is "now" in the future and has a hand in guiding/manipulating/instructing "our" Severian up-to-but-not-beyond the "line of division" event of the New Sun.

I agree with your hypothesis that the battle royal (in Yesod) is real rather than a sham--but in this I part company with the mega-conspiracy theory of Peter Wright, which sees all as a sham (not unlike the religion in Herbert's DUNE).

=mantis=

Mantis wrote:

Adam said:

...

Question 2: "I remain an agnostic about the existence of Severian1, as I said on the Urth list. But if he did exist, and did go to Yesod, take the test and fail, why did he fail?"

Why assume that Severian1 failed the test?

What "our" Severian tells us is that the first Severian went to Yesod, but did not return, becoming instead a traveller of the corridors of time. Since "our" Severian only gained this power as a consequence of becoming the New Sun, doesn't that suggest that Severian1 became the New Sun too? That's how I've always read it.

Or am I missing something (again)?