

Demons & Dragons

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 04 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1479>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

m.driussi — 04 Apr 1999, 04:38

Roy,

I can't tell if you read the part of my posting that had to do with the time Severian tried to heal all the wounded in the tent at once. So for one last time, I'll try a different example that happens much later.

On the Ship Severian comes upon a murdered steward (V, ch. 6). He tries to resurrect the steward and the entire Ship experiences a power blackout as a result. At the very least this is an illustration of not only the "energy circuit" involved with Severian's superhuman power, but also the tremendous energies required for a resurrection (normally supplied by the white fountain--and where is =that= energy coming from?).

Yet it might be worse than that: if you will allow a little interpretation of the chapters which follow. It seems likely that the mutiny he finds when the lights come on was triggered by the blackout. And the mysterious winged being? It seems quite possible that it is not a jiber, but the opposite: in Beowulf terms, it is the Dragon, of course; but in biological terms it is the antibody (the Ship has been violated by the blackout); and in Original Star Trek terms it is the mother-of-all-redshirts.

So! Severian's attempt to heal one man results in a full scale mutiny and the release of the emergency defense demon which successfully kills Severian.

Yes, I am asserting that Severian's Narrative is "The Cold Equations" (that is, the situation is "Periodic Table of Elements" rather than "Let's bamboozle the lower life forms!") writ very, very large, and without any of the lame loopholes. Little Severian is blasted for running toward the ring; big Severian is killed for trying to resurrect a dead stranger. It is all a fool-destroying, deathtrap maze, and Severian himself dies again and again, yet from time to time he still tries to help as many strangers as he can (or in another sense maybe he is just a very slow learner). Personally I don't think that the denizens of Yesod can do any more than they are doing to help; and of course the enemies of the New Sun have the best intentions as well (prevent megadeath and the destruction of Urth by promoting slavery and the long slow death).

And yes, I agree with you that Severian is an antihero.

But maybe I'm missing your point.

Yes, I must be.

=mantis=

Roy C. Lackey — 04 Apr 1999, 05:57 · follows m.driussi

mantis,

Yes, I read your earlier post carefully and thought about it; part of the reason I waited two days before replying. Perhaps in trying to be brief I didn't make myself clear. Both of the examples you cited (lazaret and steward), as well as others where Sev tried and failed to revive the dead, came before his trial and the "birth" of the New Sun. After that he has no problems raising the dead, even when he's not trying (the dead assassin). He's a walking miracle machine. He can move through space (from Nessus to the stone town) and time, heal the sick, raise the dead, tame wild animals, survive mortal injuries, and breathe under water. If he doesn't do those things I mentioned earlier (Thecla, his mother) it's because Wolfe doesn't want him to, not because he can't.

In the instances where he does raise the dead, both before and after the New Sun, the outcomes seem to be negative, some more precipitously than others. Even in the cases that are not almost immediately disastrous (e.g. Zama and the dead assassin), the apparent successes (e.g. Dorcas, Miles/Jonas) aren't happy with their revival. Even his dog runs away.

The final chapters of *_Urth_* are devoted largely to tidying up loose plot ends, most occasioned by the time-travel paradoxes, to fulfill what otherwise might be termed "prophesies" (Typhon and The Conciliator, Apu-Punchau). Sev shows up in the future about an hour before the big flood hits the House Absolute. What timing! Why not some time during the fifty years that have elapsed since he left on Tzadkiel's ship, when there was no chance of encountering another version of himself? (In keeping with the condition that he can't come too close to himself.) He could have prepared Urth's inhabitants, saved people. Nope. Not because he couldn't but because Wolfe didn't want him to. It's that simple.

Hey, it's Wolfe's story; not mine. But the points I have raised fall, I believe, within the parameters of possibility consistent with Sev's universe(s) as portrayed in the New Sun books.

And I'm not even going to mention the most glaring paradox. It takes time for the white fountain to get to Urth's sun. It was on its way as far back in time as Apu-Punchau. Therefore it had to have been in the heavens on the day Sev was born. In fact, it was around for his whole life. Only it wasn't. But it had to be. That's why I'm not going to mention it. <g>

Roy