

Infrared, light and darkness

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 01 Dec 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1997>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 01 Dec 1999, 13:06

Regarding the infrared star notion, Mark Millman wrote:

Clever thought, mantis, but I can't swallow that idea. Master Ash tells us that ice covers the entire globe in his time, which implies a cooling process. Hallvard and Typhon confirm this. If loss of plant life affected Urth's albedo so that more solar radiation were reflected, cooling might result, but a) such a change in albedo through loss of plant life seems unlikely, and b) even if there were some such change, so extreme an effect seems beyond the range of possibility.

Well now, I didn't mean to imply that there was no cooling going on at all! Just trying to de-couple visible light from heating light; to allow a habitable zone to exist where canonical astrophysics insists that it cannot be naturally; to allow a black sky at noon, yet breath-enabling atmospheric pressure (even in the mountains) and jungles of dying vegetation (dying over a thousand years or more! This ain't no Nuclear Winter/killer meteor/sudden death scenario); etc.

But it is just another idle thought, over-reading a simple romantic conceit, trying to envision how such a metaphor could be made concrete.

What Mark Millman wrote about black holes leading to other universes (and the strictly hypothetical "white hole") is clearly the theory used by Wolfe in the early 80s for his muscularly retroscientification of a scenario glimpsed by H.G. Wells in the 1890s, developed by Clark Ashton Smith, and refined by Jack Vance. So at this point, we should just use the theory of the text as bolstered by the theory of its day.

The black hole in Abaddon (subspace) leads to a white hole in Briah (normal space); the black hole in Briah leads to a white hole in Yesod (hyperspace).

On to creatures of light and darkness who feed upon stellar energies:

So much of thinking is by way of analogy. When Severian is thrust out of his claustrophobic nursery and into the larger world of the Commonwealth, he is exposed as an innocent to modes and mores that shape and challenge him (a boon for readers, since we get to learn about his society along with him). We have the sense that he is walking a path between good and evil; that he could fall into evil at various steps along the way (e.g., executing Agia after the mine ambush would be a bad thing).

I don't think that the situation changes in URTH. Severian has new powers, but the stakes are higher and the dangers become more pronounced; he is moving as an innocent in a new landscape of godlings. This is not the sort of scenario where the hero gets the halo and then all things come naturally and easily, no more tears, "the power was within you all along," etc. Rather, his life-giving miracles are met with cruelty (the Zama episode); his suppressed anger raises a storm; etc.

Thus, by analogy: there is some sort of energy circuit that feeds demigods and gods (for another Wolfe example: the way that the Earth Mother goddess in the Soldier books comes to eat the blood of the human sacrifices--this is the Blood Circuit, and it probably plays a much larger part throughout Wolfe's work than we think at first). We know from the text that Severian is being powered by the white fountain (the Claw might be an independent regulator or just a dummy light); it seems pretty clear that the light from the white fountain can be blocked by Urth's mass (it needs a direct line of sight), and in a pinch Severian can draw from a starship's battery, or even somehow the energy of an earthquake (or was that the energy of sunlight on the ground?). In any event, Severian is something of an energy vampire.

So the analogy I promised: the great monsters are creatures similiar to Severian (energy vampires), but they have fallen off the tightrope (or have chosen to embrace the Entropy side). Severian is always in danger of turning into one like them; and even in the end, there is some question of whether he really is any better (or even much different) than they are (this is usually writ in shorthand as "Is he christ or antichrist?").

So I'm saying: No new technologies for the monsters, just analogy and implication. But granted: it is easier to envision an energy tap on a white hole (from which energy is emerging) than one on a black hole (into which energy is disappearing).

The mystery of the black hole in the Old Sun remains. The mystery of energy circuits for the great monsters is largely built of conjecture.

=mantis=

Roy C. Lackey — 02 Dec 1999, 00:33 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis wrote:

[snip]

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[snip]

A minor quibble: My take on the earthquake is the exact opposite of that; the earthquake was the effect, not the cause, of the energy exchange. Severian was killed again (or at least should have been; he was hit by a bolt of energy from a Star Wars-like weapon), only he can't be killed by virtue of some sort of semi-divine fiat until the New Sun comes, just as he should have died from the beating earlier that night. The text makes clear that Urth is too tired and energy depleted for earthquakes--not to mention the unlikelihood of such a coincidence. However it was accomplished, the earthquake was the byproduct of the effort to preserve Sev's life.

This is another incidence of biblical symbology. The mysterious rent in the Curtain Wall and the tilting of the Witches' Tower are paralleled in the Gospels. According to the Gospels, at the

moment of Jesus's death on the cross: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake," (Matt. 27:51).

Roy

mark millman — 02 Dec 1999, 10:18 · follows Roy C. Lackey

At 01:06 PM 01-12-99 -0700, mantis wrote:
Well now, I didn't mean to imply that there was no cooling going on at all! Just trying to de-couple visible light from heating light; to allow a habitable zone to exist where canonical astrophysics insists that it cannot be naturally; to allow a black sky at noon, yet breath-enabling atmospheric pressure (even in the mountains) and jungles of dying vegetation (dying over a thousand years or more! This ain't no Nuclear Winter/killer meteor/sudden death scenario); etc.

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Whoops! Sorry, mantis; I should have realized that you weren't attempting to provide a complete explanation of the phenomenon. I apologize for jumping on you so quickly. Now that I've thought about it, your idea does have certain merits, especially if the sun's total energy output decreases, resulting in cooling, while it also suffers a shift driving the spectrum toward the infra-red.

What Mark Millman wrote about black holes leading to other universes (and the strictly hypothetical "white hole") is clearly the theory used by Wolfe in the early 80s for his muscularly retroscientification of a scenario glimpsed by H.G. Wells in the 1890s, developed by Clark Ashton Smith, and refined by Jack Vance. So at this point, we should just use the theory of the text as bolstered by the theory of its day.

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My purpose had been to point out that the theory in the text is, regrettably, undermined rather than bolstered by the theory of its day. The idea of the white hole was already on its way out when Wolfe was writing SotT, to say nothing of UotNS.

Mark Millman

Fr.Inire — 02 Dec 1999, 08:09 · follows mark millman

mantis wrote:

[snip]

Thus, by analogy: there is some sort of energy circuit that feeds demigods and gods (for another Wolfe example: the way that the Earth Mother goddess in the Soldier books comes to eat the blood of the human sacrifices--this is the Blood Circuit, and it probably plays a much larger part throughout Wolfe's work than we think at first). We know from the text that Severian is being powered by the white fountain (the Claw might be an independent regulator or just a dummy light); it seems pretty clear that the light from the white fountain can be blocked by Urth's mass (it needs a direct line of sight), and in a pinch Severian can draw from a starship's battery, or even somehow the energy of an earthquake (or was that the energy of sunlight on the ground?). In any event, Severian is something of an energy vampire.<<
[snip]

just had a whild-ass thought: Sev as chem? I had this thought back when I first read the book, but no-one treats him as such and I don't recall any other hints but the reliance on a power source, the taking of unconventional energy sources....hmmm....

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Jeff "My dice hate me!" Miller

"The idea of verifying facts about

the world through controlled repetition seems alien to just about everyone with the _possible_ exception of Fr Inire, and he's a bug-eyed space monster . . ."-Jim Henley Heavy Gear Swap @

<http://freecenter.digiweb.com/games/severian/swap.html> Gaming to keep War out of RealTime!
'82 GS650G