

urthquake

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 02 Dec 1999

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Roy C. Lackey — 02 Dec 1999, 18:49

mantis wrote a very insightful piece (as was the recent one about Foila, BTW) with which I quibbled on a small point:

So Roy, are you saying that the resurrection at the Convulsor was accomplished via the more usual white fountain energy rather than any other source? I can't really tell from your post.<<

Yes, assuming, that is, that that is the source.

I don't know how Wolfe thought to rationalize the quake; my only point was that it wasn't a natural one, which the text seems to support. The effect seems to have been localized. Perhaps Severian acted as a lightning rod, discharging the energy into the ground, both of the weapon and whatever supernatural revivifying agency is responsible for the suspension of the laws of physics necessary to keep him alive.

The attending physician's contention that it was a natural quake and that Sev wasn't struck by the energy beam is just the NEW SUN version of Doctor Crane's hypothesis about Silk's enlightenment. Such a timely quake, even if such geological activity still took place, just *ain't gonna happen*. It was just another miracle in the Conciliator's legend, like those in the Gospels attendant upon Jesus. Miracles have no rational explanation, and Wolfe clearly believes in miracles; you have to to be a Christian. That similar wonders occasioned by Sev's "death" at the Citadel are not replicated elsewhere when he dies wasn't necessary for the Legend or for Wolfe's theme or plot; besides, he had to account for the broken Curtain Wall. <g> Wolfe was more concerned with setting up echoes of Jesus with the Conciliator for religious resonance than explaining the science in his fiction. Bad science or good, the scientific tidbits in the Urth Cycle were just a sop thrown to the more ardent purists of the genre who, like us, strain at scientific gnats while swallowing religious camels. Rational science cannot account for many of the plot elements of NEW SUN any more than you can take a sliderule to the Bible.

That's why your face among the "hard-ish sf" crowd is not smiling. :-)

Roy

Jim Henley — 02 Dec 1999, 20:35 · follows Roy C. Lackey

-----Original Message-----

From: urth-errors at lists.best.com [mailto:urth-errors at lists.best.com]On Behalf Of Roy C. Lackey

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supernatural revivifying agency is responsible for the suspension of the
laws of physics necessary to keep him alive.

I think Roy's right, with a minor possible modification: my impression was that one of the things the quake did was ensure that the beam _missed_, or at least caught Sev only glancingly. Regardless, I class the earthquake with Big Storm on Boat as an environmental effect Sev generates.

The attending physician's contention that it was a natural quake and that Sev wasn't struck by the energy beam is just the NEW SUN version of Doctor Crane's hypothesis about Silk's enlightenment.

I'm now far enough in Long Sun that I do not, as I did when this came up before, wonder why people keep adducing Frazier...

Miracles have no rational explanation,
and Wolfe clearly believes in miracles; you have to to be a
Christian.

Or they do have a rational explanation but it's not the full explanation - that is, that the "miracle" consists in the bending of rational processes to divine purpose, or, to put it another way, the rational explanation is merely the means used to work the Divine Will.

Bad science or good, the scientific tidbits in the Urth
Cycle were
just a sop thrown to the more ardent purists of the genre who, like us,
strain at scientific gnats while swallowing religious camels.

And here I must demur. "Just a sop" is a prejudicial way of stating a viewpoint that is at least arguable and at worst obviously wrong - that is, we know that Wolfe took great pains to support his saga with a scientific foundation, and even took great pride in it. He as much as tells us that it was a major reason for writing the story. Statements from "there's no 'magic' in TBOTNS" point to his description of what he meant by "science fantasy" indicate just how important the "science fictional" aspects of the story were to him - I get the impression that it was where a lot of the
fun lay in composing the saga. That and ripping off as much Borges as possible...

Best,

Jim

"Just because you won't unlock your door
that don't mean you don't love me any more"
-- Steve Earle