

Severian's dream ideas

The Urth list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 18 Mar 2002

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maa32 — 18 Mar 2002, 17:33

In the second chapter of *Shadow of the Torturer*, which I happened to glance at quickly before I left my book in a temporarily inaccessible place, stated that Severian was certain of two ideas (almost dreams): that time itself would stop and that the sun would wink out, and that a miraculous candle or flambeau would come and restore light. The immediately following sentence struck me as a blow: that bushes would sprout feelers and crawl around, and that underbrush would grow eyes. Does anybody have access to that quote in a hurry? Does that not portend what I have been stating in my Short Sun "theories" in an eerily scary way? I can find the quote tomorrow, but I had to post while it was still fresh in my mind. More evidence for a plant to animal theme.

Another point I really think that detractors from my theory need to contend with is the obvious importance of the inhumu breeding: they start by gathering trees and vines into a hut, pretend to be human, then release their stuff into a polyploid system as primitive animals do. We are all familiar that early fetal development mirrors evolution: you start out looking like simple cell systems, then in the first month or two your fetus is practically indistinguishable from primitive animals like fish with no limbs, then you develop more and more into the shape you will take.

I contend that the step of gathering trees and vines is a case of this evolutionary process; someone needs to explain that scene satisfactorily, as well as the presence of a wall under the waters of Blue, as well as the claim that the Vanished People originated on Green before destroying "[Silk's] friends" and moving to Blue, as well as why it is mentioned that Urth is saltier than Urth twice, as well as why Babbie treats Hoof differently than he treats other characters and points to his Horns -> disprove that Babbie is Horn and my Tree theory loses most of its strength - it really relies on the presence of a tree at the end of On Blue's Waters and at the beginning of In Green's Jungles (notice how Cugino cuts the staff from a huge tree that is just like the ones on green that eat other trees). Also, you need to explain the eucharist's significance beside the transformation of one matter to another, and you need to say who was watching Silk in his forest eucharist in In Green's Jungles when he had his back turned - if you claim it was the Vanished People and not the trees, you need to account for his claim in Dorp that he had not seen the Vanished People since Horn perished on Green.

You also need to account for why Horn was so scared when he saw that the Island of the Pit was made up entirely of huge trees, and why the vanished people got so mad at the woodman when he went into the forest to cut down trees. You can't ignore these things and seriously threaten my theories, can you? Especially by math; math doesn't appear in the books, but hybridization and genetics does; in the very first chapter. Also, the previous concept of a tree ship makes the transfer from Green to Blue that the inhumu make more tenable than purely animal life. And my Urth/Blue theory simplifies the Scylla complications: she is related to the old Scylla, and really can tell the narrator how to find Seawrack. How can Scylla travel between stars; and why would the destination of the Whorl happen to have the sister of old Scylla unless Typhon and Scylla were in big cahoots? Was there any evidence that Typhon was contiguous with Scylla in time? Isn't it easier to believe that Typhon wanted to repopulate with his own particular brand of

Godhood after any foreseeable catastrophe, to insure his immortality on the home world?
(Seeing that we haven't mentioned this too much, I will now propose a theme for the Short Sun books:

Theme:

You can't go home again; either you or it has changed beyond recognition.
Horn is not Horn when he comes home; Silk can never return to Hyacinth; Silk going to New Viron is fruitless because the people there are too wicked; Pas has become Silk and will not be purely Typhon when he comes down to Blue; no one can recognize their homeworld because it has changed so much (flooded, animal life transformed, moon terraformed out of control, orbit changed, new sun). Babbie meets up with his son Hoof but is not recognized because he is in a creature, no one can recognize their home.

Account for all of these things convincingly and I will gladly concede. Marc Aramini

Jerry Friedman — 18 Mar 2002, 21:39 · follows maa32

--- maa32 <maa32 at dana.ucc.nau.edu> wrote:
In the second chapter of Shadow of the Torturer, which I happened to glance at quickly before I left my book in a temporarily inaccessible place, stated that Severian was certain of two ideas (almost dreams): that time itself would stop and that the sun would wink out, and that a miraculous candle or flambeau would come and restore light. The immediately following sentence struck me as a blow: that bushes would sprout feelers and crawl around, and that underbrush would grow eyes. Does anybody have access to that quote in a hurry? Does that not portend what I have been stating in my Short Sun "theories" in an eerily scary way? I can find the quote tomorrow, but I had to post while it was still fresh in my mind. More evidence for a plant to animal theme.

Very interesting! I think there's a good chance you're right that plants and animals are linked in some way that's not obvious (meaning that it didn't occur to me when I first read the books).

Another point I really think that detractors from my theory need to contend with is the obvious importance of the inhumu breeding: they start by gathering trees and vines into a hut, pretend to be human, then release their stuff into a polyploid system as primitive animals do.

The hut is much like bowerbirds' bowers, but it may have more significance. On the other hand, I don't remember a single trace of a suggestion of polyploidy anywhere in the Sun books. (Doubled limbs and trunks are by no means the same thing.) I also don't know of any polyploidy in primitive or advanced animals. I'll be glad to be corrected on both points.

As for releasing their gametes into the water, I think you're right that that's the method of just about every Earth animal that mates in the water, the only exception I can think of being water

birds.

We are all familiar that early fetal development mirrors evolution: you start out looking like simple cell systems, then in the first month or two your fetus is practically indistinguishable from primitive animals like fish with no limbs, then you develop more and more into the shape you will take.

Now if an inhumu *embryo* looked like a liana, that would be evidence. Unfortunately Jahlee doesn't have any of her larva pictures.

[snip some other stuff that I can't or don't want to answer right now]

-> disprove that Babbie is Horn and my Tree theory loses most of its strength

I'll do my best. The narrator is not *really* Horn, but in astral form he looks similar to Horn. If Babbie is *really* Horn, shouldn't he look very much like Horn, enough for Hoof to comment on?

[Another snip]

Also, you need to explain the eucharist's significance beside the transformation of one matter to another,

God reveals the correct way to share His grace (from a Catholic point of view, and I may not have said it right).

and you need to say who was watching Silk in his forest eucharist in In Green's Jungles when he had his back turned

...

God and all His saints and angels. Or that's how I read it.

You can't ignore these things and seriously threaten my theories, can you? Especially by math; math doesn't appear in the books, but hybridization and genetics does; in the very first chapter.

I don't think I've seen a mathematical refutation of your theories, but I think math could be relevant. Wolfe was trained as an engineer, not a biologist, and all the celestial mechanics I've been bringing up has been first-year physics.

Also, the previous concept of a tree ship makes the transfer from Green to Blue that the inhumu make more tenable than purely animal life. And my Urth/Blue theory simplifies the

Scylla complications: she is related to the old Scylla, and really can tell the narrator how to find Seawrack. How can Scylla travel between stars; and why would the destination of the Whorl happen to have the sister of old Scylla unless Typhon and Scylla were in big cahoots? Was there any evidence that Typhon was contiguous with Scylla in time?

Yes: he uploaded her into Mainframe as a goddess.

...

Theme:

You can't go home again;

(If I remember Again, Dangerous Visions correctly, Wolfe has said that he may be distantly related to Thomas Wolfe.)

either you or it has changed beyond recognition.
Horn is not Horn when he comes home; Silk can never return to Hyacinth;
Silk
going to New Viron is fruitless because the people there are too wicked;
Pas
has become Silk and will not be purely Typhon when he comes down to
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animal life transformed, moon terraformed out of control, orbit changed,
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sun). Babbie meets up with his son Hoof but is not recognized because he
is in
a creature, no one can recognize their home.

Well, I think you're right to point this theme out, even if I'm not convinced by some of your examples.

Roy C. Lackey — 18 Mar 2002, 22:32 · follows Jerry Friedman

From: maa32 <maa32 at dana.ucc.nau.edu>
Date: Monday, March 18, 2002 11:34 AM
as well as the claim

that the Vanished People originated on Green before destroying "[Silk's] friends" and moving to Blue<<

? When Horn first met the Neighbors, and they formally turned over possession of Blue to him as representative of all the people, the Neighbor who called himself Horn said, in the course of asking permission to visit Blue at will: "From this whorl we sprang." (OBW, 271)

-Roy

Michael Straight — 19 Mar 2002, 01:44 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Mon, 18 Mar 2002, maa32 wrote:
friends" and moving to Blue, as well as why it is mentioned that Urth is
saltier than Urth twice,

I think you mean Urth is saltier than Blue? Isn't that just because the dying sun means more water is frozen in the polar caps, thus the ocean salt is more concentrated?

as well as why Babbie treats Hoof differently than he
treats other characters and points to his Horns -> disprove that Babbie is
Horn and my Tree theory loses most of its strength

You almost had me wavering on this one, because it's the best explanation I've seen for Marble's prophesy about riding a beast with three horns -- which is the sort of pun Wolfe likes.

However, when the Rajan records the prophesy, he writes the aside "She actually said this," as

if to answer a skeptic who wouldn't believe she could have made such an accurate prophecy, which would indicate that the Rajan knows at that point in the narrative how the prophesy came true. But this is written long before the point where you think Horn's spirit went into Babbie, so it must refer to something that happened earlier.

Did Horn ride a three-horned beast on Green? Did the godling that picked him up outside Blood's house have horns?

another, and you need to say who was watching Silk in his forest eucharist in
In Green's Jungles when he had his back turned

Surely the Outsider?

you? Especially by math; math doesn't appear in the books, but hybridization
and genetics does; in the very first chapter.

But there's a much simpler explanation for the hybridization lecture at the beginning: it
forshadows the Silk/Horn hybrid. Occam's razor.

tenable than purely animal life. And my Urth/Blue theory simplifies the
Scylla complications: she is related to the old Scylla, and really can tell
the narrator how to find Seawrack. How can Scylla travel between stars; and
why would the destination of the Whorl happen to have the sister of old Scylla
unless Typhon and Scylla where in big cahoots?

The Mother is an undine, which we know from the Urth books can "swim between the stars"
(maybe that's literally true, maybe it's just a poetic way of saying they have access to
starships). Scylla the daughter of Typhon rebelled against him by collaborating with one of
Typhon's enemies, the "greater Scylla," also an undine. Typhon's daughter probably has a real
name (like "Pas" is really Typhon) and she may have taken her Whorl Divinity name from the
"greater Scylla" on Urth.

It's possible that the fact the Whorl ended up in the Blue/Green system is due to mechanations
of the Urth undine, attempting to deliver the ship into the clutches of her sister the Mother.

-Rostrum

William Ansley — 19 Mar 2002, 05:02 · follows Michael Straight

At 10:33 AM -0700 3/18/02, maa32 wrote:

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quickly before I left my book in a temporarily inaccessible place, stated that
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a blow: that bushes would sprout feelers and crawl around, and that underbrush
would grow eyes. Does anybody have access to that quote in a hurry? Does
that not portend what I have been stating in my Short Sun "theories" in an
eerily scary way? I can find the quote tomorrow, but I had to post while it
was still fresh in my mind. More evidence for a plant to animal theme.

Marc,

Your recollection is a wee bit faulty. Here is the quote:

Two thoughts (that were nearly dreams) obsessed me and made them [the lives of the animals
and plants that Severian watched through the window and door of "his" mausoleum in the
necropolis] infinitely precious. The first was that at some not-distant time, time itself would stop

... the colored days that had so long been drawn forth like a chain of conjuror's scarves come to an end, the sullen sun wink out at last. The second was that there existed somewhere a miraculous light - which I sometimes conceived of as a candle, sometimes as a flambeau - that engendered life in whatever objects it fell upon, so that a leaf plucked from a bush grew slender legs and waving feelers, and a rough brown brush opened black eyes and scurried up a tree.

Interestingly enough, there is no hint that the miraculous light is going to rekindle the sun in this passage.

The power of the light is to "engender life" not change plants (which are already alive) into animals. A leaf plucked from a bush is a dead leaf, even though it may take quite a while to look fully dead. So Wolfe has it turn into something like an insect to emphasize that the leaf is alive again.

And if you really think that when Wolfe refers to "a rough brown brush" above he means 'underbrush' and not a scrubbing brush, then we have no basis for further discussion.

William Ansley

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