

Time, Briah, 5HC, and other things

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 19 Apr 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3176>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 Apr 2002, 19:55

Rostrum asks:

Which raises the question again, are there no more rainbows on Urth?

And Nutria responds:

Is history running backwards on Urth, so that we are moving back toward a Garden of Eden with a Green Man?

I wonder about this also ... In my favorite passage in SHADOW, the conversation with Dorcas in the boat on the lake, is the interesting remark that "I, like you, would turn back time if I could..." (note that this is quoted from memory and somewhat-inaccurate. I am beginning to think I'm going to have to type the whole Lupiverse cycle into my computer!) Aside from the dramatic irony of the situation (Severian _has_ just turned back time and brought Dorcas to life, though neither of them knows it), it seems somehow relevant, though I'll have to post the whole quote (unless someone else gets to it first) to explain why.

Hey, I do have an answer, though it may be more than Wolfe intends. The rainbow is generated by the sun. If the Old Sun winks out for an instant before the New Sun kicks in, then briefly there is no rainbow, so there can be another Flood. Can't recall if this is so, though.

It shouldn't. The White Fountain just drops into the Old Sun; it shouldn't snuff it out or anything.

* * * * *

Now...

Does anyone else beside me remember a comment in an early interview or something in which Wolfe suggested that these books may be taking place, not in our far future, but in our distant past? This is a remarkably relevant question, for a number of reasons, among them the nature of the Severian/Christ relationship...

If this is true, then it offers a new and peculiar way to fit 5HC into the Lupiverse, by asking and answering the question: "Where did the Shadow Children come from?" They are clearly not natives of Ste-Anne; they have clearly been on Ste-Anne for a long time, and they have been keeping humans away by use of the "song of bending the sky" or whatever it's called. Who are they, when did they come, and why do they do this? Possibly-plausible answer: they are (descended from) humans from the pre-Autarchial Age of Empire.

Obviously this would be a massive retcon; Wolfe surely didn't have the whole story of Severian wandering in his head when he wrote 5HC. But it's an intriguing possibility... Wolfe seems to like finding new possibilities in old things (which is why I haven't

totally abandoned the idea that he might have retconned the Cumaeans into an inhuman). It would also allow for the possibility that there are no rainbows in the time of the Autarchs...

Adam Stephanides — 19 Apr 2002, 20:27 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

on 4/19/02 2:55 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:
Rostrum asks:

Which raises the question again, are there no more rainbows on Urth?

Is it possible that, since the sun is dim enough that the sky is black during the day, there are naturally no rainbows on Urth?

Does anyone else beside me remember a comment in an early interview or something in which Wolfe suggested that these books may be taking place, not in our far future, but in our distant past?

"It occurred to me when I began *The Book of the New Sun* that Urth has already wonders enough--if only it has inherited the wonders of Earth. Or if (as may be) Earth's wonders have descended to it from Urth." (CASTLE OF DAYS (pb), p. 249)

--Adam

James Jordan — 19 Apr 2002, 22:03 · follows Adam Stephanides

At 02:55 PM 4/19/2002, Blattid wrote:

Does anyone else beside me remember a comment in an early interview or something in which Wolfe suggested that these books may be taking place, not in our far future, but in our distant past?

Yep, though it's not "our" distant past. It was part of my loooong interview, online at <http://www.op.net/~pduggan/gwjbj.html>

And here is the relevant part, with a bit more for those who might not have read all this before. (I've tried to clean it up a bit, but someday I have to find the tapes and really clean it up.) -- Nutria

JJ: Is Briah our universe? Or is that a universe that resurrected saints have set up in the world to come as part of the cities that they made? GW: No. I thought of it as a long past universe. Something that we are repeating rather than something that we are. JJ: I don't know that I have any other questions. It is a universe in which angelic like beings actually have physical control over the universe of stars and suns. I noticed that you had scarabs in the great machine in Yesod. Severian goes through and sees that GW: Oh yeah, yeah. JJ: Scarabs push the suns. But that is a past world in your imagination. GW: Yes, I was looking at what past universes might have been like really and that is how...I began with the idea of what is going to happen to us if we just keep going the way we are going and continue to live on the continent of Earth without ever really going into the sea or going into space and we just wait for the money to run out. The do nothing future and thinking about what that would be. And then I got into the idea of universal cycles. And decided that I would show that this might be a past cycle. Some physicists at least think that the Big Bang is eventually going to be followed by a Big Gnap in which the whole universe coalesces again which will be followed by another Big Bang which is sort of like a succession of universe as piston impulses in an internal combustion engine. I certainly don't have any great emotional investment in that idea but I do think it is a useful idea to play around with. Physics is coming nearer and nearer and nearer mysticism. It has been doing this now for over 50 years and it seems to me that is a fascinating thing that much too little attention has been given to. JJ: That poses something of a difficulty in terms of Christian eschatology if there

is to be a time and there is a resurrection where the world comes to an end. Are you making an attempt to unify those two ideas or just to play with the idea of a gnostic universe? GW: I was toying with those ideas, I think, rather than trying to make sense of them. Is our resurrection going to be in another universal cycle? Well, yes, maybe it is. I don't know. We don't know what is really meant by the world coming to an end, and God rolling up the sky like a carpet and all that. It is all picturesque language. Figurative language to try to give a general idea to an audience that would not be capable of understanding the actuality. And I am not sure we are more capable of understanding that actuality than they were. It is like the Genesis story. I don't believe in a literal apple and I don't believe that literally biting into the fruit had this effect but if you have to explain to a bunch of primitives how men differ from animals and where men went wrong in differing from animals, this is a pretty good way to do it. JJ: Who is on trial in The Urth of the New Sun? Severian or Tzadkiel? Because Tzadkiel tells him as the captain of the ship _____mind. GW: Severian is really on trial. Tzadkiel is pretending to be on trial as a part of Severian's trial as I remember. JJ: Tzadkiel means the righteousness of God. GW: He is an angel of justice. JJ: He passes judgement there. Apheta, that would mean opheta with an eta: that is speechless. Was that your idea? Opheta with an epsilon could mean forgiveness. GW: No it is speechless. They talk by centering the sounds that you hear so that you think that you are hearing a voice but they are actually speechless. In a completely silent atmosphere they would be unable to speak. JJ: Right. GW: It was just a physical idea that I decided to play with and it has certain philosophical reasons to it. JJ: As if the universe of words is on one level and there is something higher or above that. GW: Well, the idea of selection. That we can make ourselves clear to somebody else by selecting things to which they pay attention. JJ: Okay. Oh... Severian's sexual relationship with her. What is the purpose of that? He is a married man so at one level he is cheating on his wife. He gets aboard ship and immediately takes a cabin near Gunnie and the way you have it written he thinks to himself well it has been 10 years since I have had anybody since Valaria. It seems to be one of his lapses in virtue at that point. GW: Yeah, I was not trying to show him as being that virtuous a man. JJ: But here you have an angelic being takes him for the night. What is going on there? Is that an idea of a celestial marriage between heaven and earth? GW: I think that the ideal of the higher being trying to raise the lower being to a greater height perhaps. And also the attraction that the lower being at least properly should feel toward the higher being. JJ: So we could interpret that more symbolic than a moral level? GW: Oh yeah, yeah. Well he is there to be morally judged but that does not mean that everything... The fact that he is acquitted doesn't mean that everything that he does or will do is right. If that is the criteria then none of us are going to make it. None of us are without sin which I realize is a platitude but it is also truth and it is very important truth. There are..., if that is what we mean by good people then there are no good people. What we have to mean by good people is people who are bad but are trying at times to be good with mixed success because that is the closest that we get. JJ: The holy slaves [Heirodules], Famulimus or one of them tells Severian that he is the center of his race, the savior of his race. That is such Christlike language you can see why interpreters would say well Severian is a Christ figure. But is there a Christ figure in the book, or is he simply for this universe? GW: In so far as there is a Christ figure it is Severian. That doesn't mean he has to be identified with Christ. He is in a position similar to that of Christ. But really it is a different position because Christ really is both God and man. Severian is not. Severian is a Christian rather than a Christ. But he is been taken as the representative of humanity by whom humanity is to be judged. This I think is what has happened perhaps with the actual human Jesus. He is or was is as fully human as you or I and we are saved by Him. By the fact that he passed. That the corruption did not destroy Him. I think that St. Paul is absolutely correct when he says that Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are tempted. I think that Jesus was tempted to commit murder or any other sin that you want to name just as the rest of us are. And the difference is that He did not sin.