

Blue as Ushas - long

The Urth list — 14 messages, 7 voices, 15 Nov 2002

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Don Doggett — 15 Nov 2002, 07:26

Hello all,

This subject is probably the most important one to me regarding the Sun Books. It's the reason I found this site and the ultimate reason I decided to join this list. Let me give a little preface before I start in. When I read TBotNS I was literally blown away. I picked it up and couldn't put it down. It was epic, and it was obvious to me that I was missing at least ninety percent of what was going on and that I would have to read it again. But first I decided to read TBotLS. I have to say that it is the only book I have read that forced me to love it. By that I mean that even though I was disappointed by its lack of epic scope, I couldn't and still can't get the characters out of my head. But I was disappointed. What besides Typhon, did this work have to do with Severian's universe? It was a long time before I picked up SS, and I did it mainly because of a need to finish the story. It is easily the most confusing of the three works (to me) but I as I worked my way through it a feeling grew and grew on me that I was in a familiar place. By the end of it all, the only way I felt the books could work was if the Whorl had somehow made it's way back to Urth. To Ushas and the New Sun. But how could I discover if this was the case? The internet, of course. I went to Google, typed in "Blue" and "Ushas" and here I am.

In my opinion, Marc Aramini has made very compelling arguments as to why Blue is indeed Ushas. There's no need to reiterate them. But there are some holes in his theory - one big one - which I hope to be able to fill. At the least I hope I can shrink them. So here goes.

I'll begin my argument thematically. It hinges on two points and I'll state them succinctly. In the NS, Wolfe makes it clear that there are other colonies of humans out in space. He makes it equally clear that it is Urth that is important to him thematically (see Father Inire's letter). His work is ultimately about us, on Urth (earth). What does a Starcrosser travelling to a random world in a universe full of human expats have to do with us? Nothing. It's just standard (boring) Sci Fi. That was my original problem with LS. Second, what does SS have to do with Severian? Why have Silk astral project to Urth to speak with him? It reeks of a cheap attempt to tie the entire series to the unrelated first volume. Silk meets Severian. Godzilla meets King Kong. Dracula meets the Wolfman. I don't like it and I don't believe it. In short, Blue as Ushas is stronger thematically as it brings both later series back to us. Of course, just because it makes me happy doesn't make it true.

Marc's theories, as far as they go, seem sound to me. The theoretical possibility of polyploidy in plant/animal hybrids (hybrids that are alluded to in the very names of the Vironese - male/animal female/plant) lower gravity on Green, even Silkhorn's time travel. All of his points are plausible but there are a few things which he hasn't been able to get around.

The first is Silkhorn's description of the red sun as a star in the night sky of Blue. This I think, is Wolfe's dirtiest trick and my solution is simple. Silk is wrong. In both series he makes a cottage industry out of being wrong. For one thing he is never described as looking at the red sun in Blue's sky. He is inside when he is talking to Juganu and he says "Standing on the tiles I will point and you will peer until at last you see a certain dim red star." He never says "I have seen this star." nor is he or anyone else described as seeing this star. It neither proves nor disproves that Blue is not Ushas.

The second is when Silkhorn says to Hide that the Neighbors are not made from the same dust

as they are - meaning that they are not from the same planet. But why would the author bother to say something like this when it should be obvious. Silkhorn is once again wrong (his most endearing trait, I think) and this is a rhetorical device by the author (Wolfe) to make us think about this supposedly obvious fact.

The third (and last objection that I plan to deal with) is the biggest and the hardest to surmount. The Whorl left from Urth in the Age of the Monarch and the only way it could end up in the time of Ushas is for it to travel faster than light. The argument is that there is not any good evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, to claim that it did. Not so. I did some very cursory study of faster than light travel and one of the theoretical occurrences when something goes ftl is that time stops. This happens on the first page (god, I love Wolfe) on Nightside of the Long Sun. When Silk is enlightened, he is aware that time has stopped. I know that Mr. Wolfe has said in an interview that the enlightenment of Silk is purely miraculous but this is a tricky statement. Silk's miraculous enlightenment is in his awareness, not in the stoppage of time. This, coupled with Maytera Marble's internal clock being off by 3000 years (an otherwise pointless bit of trivia) is enough circumstantial evidence to at least drag the argument into the realm of plausibility. Wow, you say. That's a big bunch of nothin'. Well I have one more thing and believe it or not, it is extratextual evidence that Blue is likely Ushas. It is an entry in Mantis' very fine Lexicon Urthus regarding THE OLD WOMAN WHOSE ROLLING PIN IS THE SUN. Now I haven't read this story so all I can comment on is the entry. I'll quote the relevant parts for those who don't have the book, and those who do can verify I'm not being misleading.

The Old Woman Whose Rolling Pin is the Sun - a short tale, told by a man to his grand daughter Becca, explaining the nature of the cosmos: . . . The story makes reference to "our longfather," a culture hero who went to the stars. . . Commentary: Wolfe has a few stories that deal explicitly with the zodiac. . . but this one seems tied to the Urth Cycle by a few points, the most apparent being the name "Skuld" for the planet Venus, another being the reference to Fauna, who appears in a story in the brown book. The "longfather" might be another avatar of the New Sun, or a later name for The Sleeper god of Ushas. The astronomy of the story shows that it is taking place in the northern hemisphere, and that the stars are in the same positions that they are today, so the story is probably set in the Age of Ushas.

I don't know about you, but that "longfather" sounds a lot to me like a certain FATHER Silk, aka the LONG Sun, who is fast becoming a culture hero of Blue, and who heads off to the stars at the end of Return to the Whorl. And that my friends, is the most compelling argument I have.

Don

James Wynn — 15 Nov 2002, 16:19 · follows Don Doggett

Don posits:

The Whorl left from Urth in the Age of the Monarch and the only way it could end up in the time of Ushas is for it to travel faster than light. The argument is that there is not any good evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, to claim that it did. Not so. I did some very cursory study of faster than light travel and one of the theoretical occurrences when something goes ftl is that time stops. This happens on the first page (god, I love Wolfe) on Nightside of the Long Sun. When Silk is enlightened, he is aware that time has stopped.

Crush responds:

I'm really not qualified to say much about your other arguments (except that I am intrigued by your "longfather" tie-in) but on *this* I'm have problem.

Silk is not only "aware" that Time has stopped. He says he was *outside* Time. The speed in which Time is moving at the "time" of his enlightenment is irrelevant to him since such

differences only matters from the perspective of persons *in* Time. So the Time stoppage for Silk doesn't tell us anything either way.

-- Crush

Roy C. Lackey — 16 Nov 2002, 05:48 · follows James Wynn

Don Doggett wrote:

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Rather than argue the nuts-and-bolts, let me address the thematic objections. As you acknowledge, the galaxy had been conquered long ago by the First Empire. The effect of Urth being turned into Ushas was largely symbolic; it wasn't going to wipe out the human race. It was much too late for that. The wounding of Urth's sun, whether directly by Typhon's actions or as retribution for them, had no galaxy-wide ripple effect. Agents of the Increate, judging from Apheta's testimony, were constrained, somewhat, by the laws of physics from punishment en masse.

To credit the two-headed madman Sev met on the mountain in the Age of the Monarch with building and launching the _Whorl_ with the intent of having it return, a thousand years in the future, to restock the planet with the flora and fauna and, especially, the people of old Urth, presupposes that Typhon knew the future. More specifically, that Typhon knew that the Conciliator would come, that the New Sun would supplant him, that all his works, including his monumental carved mountain, would be drowned with little or no trace remaining to show that he had ever existed. That is not the megalomaniac I read about in NS. Typhon was a bad guy, not a savior. Typhon was emblematic of the problem, not the solution.

Unless you are suggesting that Typhon launched the _Whorl_ for his own reasons that had nothing to do with a planned return to either Urth or Ushas--that if it did return to the planet from which it was launched, it did so by accident or third-party design--then I don't see how Blue can be Ushas.

Second, what does SS have to do with Severian? Why have Silk astral project to Urth to speak with him? It reeks of a cheap attempt to tie the entire series to the unrelated first volume. Silk meets Severian. Godzilla meets King Kong. Dracula meets the Wolfman. I don't like it and I don't believe it. In short, Blue as Ushas is stronger thematically as it brings both later series back to us. Of course, just because it makes me happy doesn't make it true.

Remember that David Hartwell apparently thought that the original four volumes of the NS needed some sort of coda, which led Wolfe to write URTN. I don't know, but I suspect, that Wolfe felt some obligation to tie the LS and SS series to NS. Wolfe corresponds with various members of this list, has answered questions submitted by list members about the LS books, and was probably aware before he wrote it that many of his most faithful readers *wanted* Sev to make an appearance in SS. I feel almost certain that the business about Sev's "sister" in SS was a direct bow in this general direction.

The third (and last objection that I plan to deal with) is the biggest and the hardest to surmount. The Whorl left from Urth in the Age of the Monarch and the only way it could end up in the time of Ushas is for it to travel faster than light.

I don't think you need to resort to FTL travel. At near-but-sub-light speeds, the _Whorl_ could have experienced 1/3 the subjective time-passage of the millenium that elapsed on Urth. Just have the ship travel in a big circle.

Or are you suggesting that the Blue of Horn's day was in the far future of the Ushas that Sev saw? That a new civilization (Neighbors) had risen from the mud of Urth-come-Ushas, that the new civilization had fallen to ruin, both on Ushas and Lune, and abandoned both worlds for greener pastures around another star?

-Roy

Don Doggett — 16 Nov 2002, 06:06 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Hi Roy! You wrote:

"Unless you are suggesting that Typhon launched the _Whorl_ for his own reasons that had nothing to do with a planned return to either Urth or Ushas--that if it did return to the planet from which it was launched, it did so by accident or third-party design--then I don't see how Blue can be Ushas."

Bingo! That's precisely my argument. Typhon is the biggest jerk in the universe. I think that's the reason the Whorl leaves at the end of SS. Pas realizes he's been had; that all he's done is taken one big walk around the block. Heh heh heh.

You also say:

"Remember that David Hartwell apparently thought that the original four volumes of the NS needed some sort of coda, which led Wolfe to write URTN. I don't know, but I suspect, that Wolfe felt some obligation to tie the LS and SS series to NS. Wolfe corresponds with various members of this list, has answered questions submitted by list members about the LS books, and was probably aware before he wrote it that many of his most faithful readers *wanted* Sev to make an appearance in SS. I feel almost certain that the business about Sev's "sister" in SS was a direct bow in this general direction."

I like to think that Wolfe wouldn't pander to the crowd (forgive the harsh phrasing but it seems the most apt) and as I said before I don't believe it, but of course it's possible.

and last:

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Bullseye once again. Though I'm honestly not sure where the Neighbors have gone.

Don

Chris — 16 Nov 2002, 07:58 · follows Don Doggett

And another lurker emerges from the shadows...

Greetings all, I have been reading the list for a month or four now. I'm very impressed with the quality of discussion here, and the archives have helped me on numerous occasions so far. I finally signed up for the list to post something, but the topic you were on at the time has passed and there's no use dragging that out. But now that I'm here I might as well post, eh?

I've been following this argument, and while as far as the integrity of the works are concerned I don't think Blue being (or not being) Ushas makes any difference, nonetheless I think that the FTL angle is a red herring.

It stands to reason that the ship itself wasn't made for FTL travel, otherwise it wouldn't have been made a generation ship. The ship could be accelerated to light speed by a miracle, of course, but generally speaking the Outsider doesn't work that way. Yes, God does work in mysterious ways, but there's a certain perversity involved in manifesting divine power to change the course of a starship and violate the laws of physics, and yet working so indirectly (through Silk) on affairs inside the starship. As far as the time stoppage, if this were a product of the ship's velocity then everyone would have experienced it, not just Silk - not to mention there are some other effects of such phenomena that would have been rather disruptive to the Whorl.

Well, hopefully this post hasn't been too lengthy or wasteful. For my own selfish reasons, I'll extend it one more paragraph though. I'm currently reading *Soldier of Arete* for the first time, and have not read Herodotus, though I would like to - I'm getting a copy this weekend, in fact, and I wondered if anyone here had a translation they would particularly recommend above all others. Also related to *Soldier*, I was rather struck by the similarity between Latro's depression and the despair experienced by Silk toward the end of LS, I was wondering if anyone had commented on that before. Not that I think the two are related, but I think they are so similar that it makes me suspect that the circumstances behind both may have a lot in common.

Peace,
Chris

Hi Roy! You wrote:

"Unless you are suggesting that Typhon launched the *Whorl* for his own reasons that had nothing to do with a planned return to either Urth or Ushas--that if it did return to the planet from which it was launched, it did so by accident or third-party design--then I don't see how Blue can be Ushas."

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Don

Joe Cilluffo — 16 Nov 2002, 14:33 · follows Chris

Don wrote:

<<

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Bullseye once again. Though I'm honestly not sure where the Neighbors have gone. >>

Hello, Don.

I always thought that LS and SS took place chronologically in Severian's past -- when he was an apprentice and found/revived Triskele, met Thecla, etc., all took place in the future relative to Typhon. He met Typhon in Urth of the New Sun in Severian's past, and thus the LS/SS series cannot be Ushas because it only took about 250 years for the Whorl to reach Blue. I know that with GW time travel is always a possibility, but the Whorl, as has been commented, didn't seem to be constructed for FTL travel.

It's an intriguing thought, though, this Blue as Ushas vein, and I have always felt that Blue seemed like Ushas despite not understanding how it could be so - the ruins of the Vanished People's world are the most obvious tie, and Green of course is reminiscent of Urth's green moon. But there was one other textual hint that tantalized me. I am looking at p. 203 of the new Tor version. When Horn is trapped in the pit that Krait rescues him from, "Once, as I lay there at the bottom of the pit, it seemed to me that a man with a long nose (a tall man or an immense spider) stood over me. I did not move or even open my eyes, knowing that if I did he would be gone. He touched my forehead with something he held, and the pit vanished." To me this sounds like Sev with the Claw -- the immense spider look is a result of his fuligin cloak, and he typically went about reanimating people by placing the Claw on their foreheads. Horn proceeds

to have an hallucination about Nettle cooking for him, which is not unexpected -- all of the others Sev reanimates are dazed for some time thereafter but, because NS is written from Sev's perspective, we do not know if they are basically in a fog or whether they hallucinate as Horn did. But to me this seemed like Severian bringing Horn back from the dead, which makes you think that perhaps Blue indeed is Ushas.

I should say though that I have about thirty pages of Blue left and haven't read Green or RTTW yet, although I have read NS and LS, so I could be missing something or repeating the obvious, for which I apologize! :)

- Joe

Don Doggett — 16 Nov 2002, 21:00 · follows Joe Cilluffo

Joe wrote:

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Don enthusiastically replies:

Yes, yes, yes indeed! I have always felt that that was Severian with the claw. I think Severian is also the creature who climbs in the boat during the storm. Possibly the eldest Severian in his time line, one who has evolved with the rest of Ushas. There are others but I won't mention them as they are in the later books and you haven't read them. I think Wolfe sets up all of these obvious clues that Blue is Ushas and then periodically tries to kill them with things like Silk's claims of bilocation (he is wrong and that is obvious by the Grandmother's story set in Grandecitta) and his claim that he will show Juganu the red star in Blue's sky (which he never does, because it's not there).

Don

Don Doggett — 16 Nov 2002, 21:12 · follows Don Doggett

Hi Chris. You wrote:

As far

as the time stoppage, if this were a product of the ship's velocity then everyone would have experienced it, not just Silk - not to mention there are some other effects of such phenomena that would have been rather

disruptive
to the Whorl.

I would argue that Silk's awareness of the time stoppage is an anomalous result of his being out of time, by way of his enlightenment. I think it more likely that no one would notice a change in the velocity of a body the size of the Whorl. It is, after all, the size of a small planet. As for disruptions, the Whorl is already quite disrupted before Silk's enlightenment, and it grows quickly worse as the narrative progresses. Of course, I know very little of ftl travel.

Don

Roy C. Lackey — 17 Nov 2002, 09:11 · follows Don Doggett

Welcome, Chris

It stands to reason that the ship itself wasn't made for FTL travel, otherwise it wouldn't have been made a generation ship. The ship could be accelerated to light speed by a miracle, of course, but generally speaking the Outsider doesn't work that way. Yes, God does work in mysterious ways, but there's a certain perversity involved in manifesting divine power to change the course of a starship and violate the laws of physics, and yet working so indirectly (through Silk) on affairs inside the starship. As far as the time stoppage, if this were a product of the ship's velocity then everyone would have experienced it, not just Silk - not to mention there are some other effects of such phenomena that would have been rather disruptive to the Whorl.

I agree that FTL travel for the _Whorl_ is very doubtful. Anyway, the usual take on FTL ships is that they travel *backwards* in time. Therefore the arrival of the ship in Ushas' far future is even less likely.

-Roy

Don Doggett — 18 Nov 2002, 06:17 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy, you wrote:
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Please explain. Is this the usual SF take on FTL or is there a physics explanation that makes backward time travel the most likely? I'm pretty ignorant on this.

Don

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 18 Nov 2002, 18:02 · follows Don Doggett

Scribble, scribble, scribble ... another great thick post, eh Mr. Lackey?

The wounding of Urth's sun, whether directly by Typhon's actions or as retribution for them, had no galaxy-wide ripple effect.

This puzzles me. I have wondered for some time just why many of the participants on this list assume that the wounding of the Old Sun took place during the reign of Typhon. In reading the Typhon-era passages of UotNS, I received the distinct impression that Typhon reigned under a

wounded Old Sun. Can anyone give some specifics?

cilluff1 at optonline.net — 18 Nov 2002, 18:58 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Blattid wrote:

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--Blattid>>>

This is just from recollection, I don't have the book on hand, but I seem to recall that Typhon sent people off Urth on the spaceships because the sun was dying and meant to go himself but the rebels prevented him.

- Joe

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 18 Nov 2002, 19:29 · follows cilluff1 at optonline.net

Joe wrote:

This is just from recollection, I don't have the book on hand, but I seem to recall that Typhon sent people off Urth on the spaceships because the sun was dying and meant to go himself but the rebels prevented him.

Yes, I recall that also ... but this does not automatically imply that the Old Sun has just started to die in his time. As I said, I had the impression it had been going on rather longer than that.

Andy Robertson — 18 Nov 2002, 19:51 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

See Typhon's discourse to Severian . .

I don't have it to hand but it includes something along the lines of "the scientists were wrong - solar radiation declined two parts in a thousand, then stabilised . . . "

The implication being not merely that the Sun had been wounded in Typhon's time, but that he had had a part in it.

hartshorn

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

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Monday, November 18, 2002 7:29 PM

Subject: RE: (urth) Blue as Ushas - long

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