

The Blushas Challenge: Round Two

The Urth list — 6 messages, 4 voices, 02 Dec 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3636>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 02 Dec 2002, 17:08

I wrote:

I offer extra credit if it does not include any lame invocations of relativity. ("Oh, see, well, 1000 years have passed for the cargo of the Starcrosser, so they project to 1000 years after when the Duko left...")

And several people responded, beginning with Jeff Veyera:

I thought that Pas/Typhon's daughter Scylla had possessed Oreb at that point. They went back to Urth as she had been born there.

That explains where, but not when -- if Scylla-in-Oreb "guided" the Narrator and company back to Urth then, just like the Duko, one would expect her to "lead" them back to the Time of the Tyrant.

Nice try, though.

The ever-fertile mind of Marc Aramini came up with two theories -- which, to his credit, he describes as "absurd," and even points out one flaw (not the biggest) in his first:

Here is one: that Severian is actually going back with them to be placed in the tomb he will one day lie in - part of Scylla is Severian, who is ACTUALLY the dark spot floating next to the boat in both worlds (as the Vanished Person Swimmer who comes up on Horn's boat)- and perhaps he is folded into himself in the past of Urth and this explains why Severian always had some presentiment of his future from the very beginning. Of course, this only accouts for Severian's presence on Blue in the last two visits to Urth, not in the first case with Rigolio. Or perhaps when he goes back he joins up with Scylla to rest inside Oreb. But it does account for his statement that he will end up in that tomb, which we have never seen actuated.

The biggest flaw, it seems to me, lies in that this "explanation" works only if we accept that Scylla (or, rather, Li'l Scylla-in- Oreb) carries a "piece" of Severian, thus invoking an additional, even more dubious and hypothetical construct, to provide "evidence" for the one my challenge calls into question.

The other is that Severian is a vortex of time - a vivimancer, who attracts anyone with the ability to cross time (like the green man or Ossipago, et al.)

This strikes me as the best of the explanations offered. It even has (I think) surface plausibility -- Severian does appear to have a remarkable knack for running into timewalkers, whom, I think, we must regard as a relatively small population.

On the other hand, if we take into account that the Hieros (and others) manipulate many-to-most of the significant events of Severian's life up to (at least) the time he summons the New Sun, then neither coincidence nor Severian as vivimancer seem necessary to explain _that_. Furthermore, Wolfe describes a vivimancer as a dead person who calls the living to him -- and I don't think we can reasonably call Severian "dead" at the time of the Narrator's visits ...

Or the affinity between Malrubius and Silk could serve as that anchor.

I guess we can consider this a third, bonus, theory from Marc, though it falls prey to the same flaw I shall invoke in a moment against this one, from Don Doggett...

... If the person in the pit who revives Horn is Severian as a Vanished Person then there was a comingling of the two. Whether you accept that it was Severian or not, at least grant me that there was a mingling of "whatevers".

(Umm ... on what ground should we grant this?)

Therefore the narrator is also part Severian in addition to being part Silk and part Horn, and could thus travel to Severian's time.

Now, wait a minute.

First, you have made a huge leap here. Even if I accepted outright that the person who revives the Narrator is (for some meaning of "is") Severian, that does not automatically make the Narrator part-Severian, any more than it does, say, Miles-Jonas.

But second, and this seems to me the greater flaw, and the one I mentioned above: it invokes the Blushas theory to support itself in a rather painfully circular manner. That is: the Narrator's party can travel to Urth of Severian's time _because_ the Narrator contains some bits of Severian. The Narrator contains bits of Severian _because_ Blue = Ushas ... but that very hypothesis required us to raise the question of astral time-travel in the first place. If we leave out the Blushas theory, then we can simply assume that all the astral travel sections in tBotSS take place at the "same" time (ignoring, again, relativistic quibbles about simultaneity) as the place travelled from. Rigoglio (and, possibly, Scylla-in-Oreb) help the Narrator to astrally travel to the place they come from, but not the time they come from -- Severian's late childhood and the foreground action of Short Sun take place at, more or less, the same time.

* * * * *

Summary as of Round One:

I grant that the Blushas theory, with these time-travel workarounds, has a certain degree of self-consistence, as far as it goes, but I could begin by hypothesizing that Silk "is" really Santa Claus, and then explain everything that seems difficult away by invoking Santa magic -- after all, Santa, as we all know, has mickle powers.

While I appreciate Don's suggestion that Wolfe might have built a deliberate ambiguity into the text, it seems to me that the Blue = Ushas "reading" introduces all sorts of problems and complexities which simply disappear if we accept the more straightforward idea that the Bleen system lies a few dozen lightyears (or however far the Whorl might reasonably travel in 1000/300 years) away from the Urth system. The question of why the Narrator's party would astrally travel to Urth at a time when none of them had been there seems to me to stand as

emblematic and typical, but hardly exhaustive, of these problems.

If the proponents of the Blushas theory cannot, then, produce an answer to this question which neither invokes the Blushas theory to explain itself in circular manner, nor invokes additional tortured hypotheses to support the principal unproven -- in other words, if they cannot simplify the otherwise-unnecessary complexities which the theory imposes upon any understanding of the events of the story -- then I think we have to regard the theory as deeply flawed.

James Jordan — 02 Dec 2002, 18:03 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

I should think that everyone admits that Wolfe intends some analogies between the Blue-Green system and the Urth/Ushas-Lune system -- maybe particularly Ushas, since we have *On Blue's WATERS* and the Ushan Green Man to think about. These surface analogies invite thematic reflection, so that Blue may be showing us things about the possible future of Ushas, but without being the same planet as Ushas.

Analogy is not identity, however. Consider the analogy between the Neighbors and the Narrator. The Neighbors leave and then return to turn Blue over to humanity, and leave. The Narrator leaves (to the Whorl, where some of the Neighbors also went) and then returns and brings about several political reformations and sets humanity on a better course -- which they may or may not follow -- and then leaves. We could probably come up with more analogies, analogies that help us understand the shape of the narrative. But clearly the Narrator is not a Neighbor.

Wolfe deals with analogies a lot, chinese boxes wherein one system of things is duplicated to some extent at a "higher" or "lower" or "later" level. Viron-Ayuntamiento-Silk is a kind of smaller analogy for Whorl-rebellious gods-Pas. Viron-Silk and Whorl-Pas is kind of like Israel-Jesus and Rome-Emperor. Commonwealth-Severian is like Urth-Conciliator. Etc.

With this in mind, I should think that there are fruitful things to be investigated about Ushas-Blue analogies. But these would be analogies and parallels, in terms of how Wolfe sets things out. From this standpoint, the Narrator's visit to Severian is not just something thrown into the text to satisfy fans, but also an indication that Blue's waters tell us something about the future of Ushah's waters. It helps solidify the analogy and adds more dimension and depth to the overall super-narrative. On a strictly literal level, the Starcrosser ark just goes to another planet. On a deeper level, but only by analogy, the ark goes through the flooding waters of Urth and comes to Ushas.

I think the argument for identity does founder exactly where Dan'I suggests: the question of WHY the Narrator returns to Urth precisely when he does. Those arguing for identity have to show two things: 1. that this astral travel can also be time-travel for someone in the parties who make the trip, either the Narrator or someone else; and 2. importantly, the reason why the time-travel takes the party to precisely this particular time on Urth. Unless both of these can be credibly shown -- and maybe they can -- then we need to be content with analogy and not identity.

A subsidiary matter: Does time-travel also involve spatial travel? I don't recall from the Severian narrative, but I think it does. But I note that the astral travel to Urth does involve returning to a particular place in the life of one of the travellers. That is, astral travel is spatially pegged, so it should be temporally pegged as well. But we don't go back to the time that this man (name escapes me) came from, and that's what we should expect to do if the connection in space is also a connection in time. This fact only strengthens Dan'I's question. If they are travelling in the corridors of time, then why are they snapped back to this particular place? Why not some other place? If the link is with Severian somehow, and Severian at this particular time of his life, then why did they not arrive in his presence immediately?

Naw. They go back to Urth because one member of the party was from Urth. They go where they go because that's where he was. They go when they go because it is the same time on Urth as on Blue/Green, because there is no time-traveller among them.

Also, let's assume for discussion's sake that there are smart trees on Urth and that they are

related to Neighbors and inhumani. This does not prove identity, because we know that Urth people had been to the stars; we know that Scylla has a presence on both Urth and Blue; we know that for some reason Typhon sent a ship to Blue -- I've suggested Scylla's prompting for this. So, even if we were to find smart trees in the Severian Quintet, this does not indicate identity, only contact between the two worlds at some earlier time and the transport of Blue/Green lifeforms to Urth.

FWIW

Nutria

Jerry Friedman — 02 Dec 2002, 22:50 · follows James Jordan

--- James Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:

I should think that everyone admits that Wolfe intends some analogies between the Blue-Green system and the Urth/Ushas-Lune system

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maybe particularly Ushas, since we have *On Blue's WATERS* and the Ushan

Green Man to think about.

...

I don't admit that. This is from the interview with Nick Gevers:

"[NG] [Trying again:] Can your readers usefully view The Fifth Head of Cerberus as being set in the same science-fictional universe as New Sun, Long Sun, and Short Sun? Why does Fifth Head's pattern of blue/green sister worlds recur so tantalisingly in Urth/Lune, Blue/Green?

"[GW] I don't know."

This was a very good opportunity for Wolfe to say which question he was answering, or to answer part of the second question--just the reference to Urth/Lune, Blue/Green. Regardless of what an answer would have done to the slope of the playing field, I wish he had. In any case, I think it's quite possible that the answer is simply that Wolfe likes pairs of worlds, and that when they're science-fictional pairs of planets he likes the blue-and-green color scheme, the two main colors of Earth. It's also quite possible that we're to see them as analogous, as you point out. And Marc's recent list of similarities, which I consider inarguable (Finally! But no doubt someone will argue.) makes it quite possible that they're the same planet.

By the way, Dan'I challenged people who believed that Silkhorn's dreams of Severian crossed time as well as space to explain why he projected to that particular time. To me, that's not even an obstacle. From Wolfe's point of view, he seems to think that having Silk and Severian in the same universe was a gun on the wall that had to go off. And from the point of view of the fictional universe (the deictic point of view?), there are powers above the stage, and they may easily have had some reason for wanting to arrange a meeting--such as to have Severian resurrect Silk.

I'd still like to see some fingerprints, though.

Jerry Friedman

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 02 Dec 2002, 23:03 · follows Jerry Friedman

Jerry F wrote...

By the way, Dan'l challenged people who believed that Silkhorn's dreams of Severian crossed time as well as space to explain why he projected to that particular time. To me, that's not even an obstacle. From Wolfe's point of view, he seems to think that having Silk and Severian in the same universe was a gun on the wall that had to go off.

Agreed, so far as that goes; but the question (as I hope should be clear) was intended from the point of view of the fictional universe (the deictic point of view?),

(OK, I really do not understand this use of the word "deictic.")

there are powers above the stage, and they may easily have had some reason for wanting to arrange a meeting--such as to have Severian resurrect Silk.

They may indeed, but even this is slightly askew to the question ... I am asking the pro-Blushas faction to describe some mechanism, internal to the fictive universe, consistent with the text and ideally with some modicum of textual support, which simplifies a reading of the "astral travel" segments of the text at least as much as they are complicated by accepting the Blue = Ushas theory in the first place -- keeping in mind that one of the more significant complexities so introduced is astral time travel itself; let the Bleen system be 800LY or so from Urth and we can just assume that the timelines are simultaneous (whatever _that_ means in a universe which conforms to Einstein, Lorenz-FitzGerald, etc.)

Jerry Friedman — 02 Dec 2002, 23:21 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

--- Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <ddanehy at siebel.com> wrote:
Jerry F wrote...

...

[From]
the point of view of the fictional universe (the deictic point of view?),

(OK, I really do not understand this use of the word "deictic.")

My mistake. "Diegetic". There, that should be much clearer. :-)

there are powers above the stage, and they may easily have had some reason for wanting to arrange a meeting--such as to have Severian resurrect Silk.

They may indeed, but even this is slightly askew to the question ... I am asking the pro-Blushas faction to describe some mechanism, internal to the fictive universe, consistent with the text and ideally with some modicum of textual support, which simplifies a reading of the "astral travel" segments of the text at least as much as they are complicated by accepting the Blue = Ushas theory in the first place -- keeping in mind that one of the more significant complexities so introduced is astral time travel itself; let the Bleen system be 800LY or so from Urth and we can just assume that the timelines are simultaneous (whatever _that_ means in a universe which conforms to Einstein, Lorenz-FitzGerald, etc.)

"Simplifies". I can't help with that.

Jerry Friedman

Charles Reed — 03 Dec 2002, 03:50 · follows Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman wrote:

By the way, Dan'l challenged people who believed that Silkhorn's dreams of Severian crossed time as well as space to explain why he projected to that particular time. To me, that's not even an obstacle. From Wolfe's point of view, he seems to think that having Silk and Severian in the same universe was a gun on the wall that had to go off.

No, I disagree. The gun on the wall was nothing so cosmic as having Silk and Severian in the same universe. It's much more simple:

Horn/Silk could, in certain situations, astral-project to places that either he or one of his companions had actually been to. The "sleepers" from the Whorl -- even though their memories had been tampered with -- were from Urth. If Horn/Silk were to get together with one of these sleepers, then . . .

That's the gun that has to go off.

Charles