

An introduction and a question

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 03 Mar 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/397>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Dan Parmenter — 03 Mar 1998, 15:51

Hello

My name is Dan Parmenter and I have just joined the URTH list. I was never on the WHORL list, mostly because I haven't read EXODUS yet and I wanted to keep my mind free of spoilers. I've been a Wolfe fan since I read BOTNS for the first time in 1984. That same year I met Wolfe at Boskone, a New England SF convention. I've since read the series two more times and have read FIFTH HEAD, 3/4 of LONG SUN and numerous short stories and essays. I fully intend to read all of his other novels, though I would prefer to squeeze BOTNS just a little dryer before moving on. For the record, I'm involved in the machine translation field. We produce software to translate from one language to another and I do dictionary and grammar development, which has always struck me as a somewhat Wolfeian profession (not one he would have, but one that he might describe in a story).

I have a few questions and one comment. I've looked over most of the archives and while some of these questions have been addressed, I think there may be more to say on certain topics.

Severian's Memory: Somehow in the course of reading the series I became convinced that the method of Severian's time-travel is based on his "perfect" memory. I can't recall a specific statement of this, other than the hierodules commenting that it was important. He often refers to getting lost in his own memories. If what he says is true and the unfolding of memory is tantamount to re-experiencing certain events, it's not much of a stretch to imagine that this could potentially lead to branching. Not necessarily significant branching of the sort that would lead to either the new sun or the "entropy" future, but minor branching within those two possibilities/parallel universes. At a certain point, perhaps the alternate timelines simply reconverge, and nobody really notices any minor differences. I'm thinking here of the cases where Severian's memory is inconsistent. I can only call to mind the "manskin" to "leather" bag transition offhand, but there are others. Perhaps this is simply too obvious to merit any serious discussion, but I find it interesting. It's always seemed to me that the question of how many times Severian dies is an open one. At the end of UotNS he seems to try to kill himself every couple of pages!

One of my favorite parts of BOTNS is the story about Master Ash. I often find myself reading that chapter as almost a separate story, a story about a soldier's attempts to rescue a man who doesn't want to be rescued and his reasons. While the character and the incidents are quite integral to Severian's story, it's always struck me that the story could easily stand on its own. It's one of the saddest chapters and the image of a house whose stories represent different epochs is a strong one.

Dan

Peter Stephenson — 04 Mar 1998, 09:45 · follows Dan Parmenter

About Dan Parmenter's comment on Master Ash (and without looking back at the archives to see if this has come up, I'm new here too): The second time I read the Book, I remember having a powerful feeling that I was missing something about this episode and came to the conclusion that the house represented the world ash tree Yggdrasil of the Norse myths, which fits in with the Ragnarok (probably missing a consonant or two) future of ice. My Norse mythology isn't too strong, but I think the tree had a deer in its branches and a dragon gnawing at its roots. I don't remember any properties to do with time, though.

Master Ash's cold future is presumably somehow opposed to the warm future of the Green Man, but I haven't worked out if this has anything to say about the latter.

Peter

CRCulver — 08 Mar 1998, 23:03 · follows Peter Stephenson

At the end of UotNS he seems to try to kill himself every couple of pages!<

I'm not sure he actively tries to kill himself, but he does seem to feel that his death would be no big loss, because he has already completed the greatest act in his life (and human history): bringing the New Sun.

I can only call to mind the "manskin" to "leather" bag transition offhand, but there are others.<

That one has always puzzled me.

This list has been quiet for a few days now, let's liven it up.

Christopher R. Culver <crculver at aol.com>
<http://members.aol.com/crculver/index.html>