

Sev's skull and spring constellations

The Urth list — 7 messages, 7 voices, 07 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4065>

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maa32 — 07 Jul 2003, 05:53

The recent discussion has prompted me to look once again at the end of Urth of the New Sun. I think we can all agree that the skull that Severian finds at the bottom of the lake when he goes diving during the flood is the skull of a Severian who did in fact drown at the opening scene of the book, where the "new" Severian takes up his narrative. Just as the narrator of Urth of the New Sun is different than the narrator of Book of the New Sun, I always thought that the narrator of Book of the New Sun was qualitatively different than the boy who died in the river. Thinking about how Severian could be drowned and dead, and still revived and not be an eidolon all along, is a bit confusing to those (like me) who don't understand the full capabilities of the hierodules. Notice that they definitely, absolutely, have the power to travel back in time.

Now I was wondering about the very odd "cross and the Unicorn" constellations that appear in the sky when the miracle of Apu-Punchau occurs and the long night of Urth heralds in Severian's identity as Sun God. In the final post-script to his series, entitled "The Miracle of Apu-Punchau", Wolfe seems to be inviting the reader to come up with a viable large "opaque" object to cover the sun so that the long night can happen. Then he goes on to say that the winter constellations that should appear over the stone town are inexplicably replaced by spring constellations (the cross and the unicorn, I presume). I know that, at least in Asian mythology, the unicorn symbolizes either the birth or the death of a great man. (the cross is obvious)

Mooncalf recently brought my attention to recent studies on solar sails and how they might be contiguous with mirrors. So, are we to believe that the solar sails reflected constellations that were actually on the other side of the Urth, or are we to believe that a rift in the universe allowed the unexpected constellations to appear? What else could have come through that rift? Notice that at the very end of the chapter in which the long night occurs, Severian says that his shadow falls across the sun and Urth. He has been somewhat wary of calling the world of the past Urth, but I need to read the whole thing again more carefully. Also, remember the science of father Inire's mirrors: reflected light that leaves the universe and re-enters at another point must create an object to reflect that light at its new location. Remember all that weird blue glass on the planet Blue? The first time I read it, it reminded me of the claw of the conciliator. Especially knowing that the material which is actually the claw is a part of a bush.

If we think of the claw as a proto-Severian, or a world within a world, then perhaps light that passes through the claw and leaves the universe for whatever reason can indeed create something ... larger when it re-enters.

Marc Aramini

Spectacled Bear — 07 Jul 2003, 12:36 · follows maa32

At 06:53 2003-07-07, maa32 wrote:

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how they might be contiguous with mirrors. So, are we to believe that the solar sails reflected constellations that were actually on the other side of the Urth, or are we to believe that a rift in the universe allowed the unexpected constellations to appear?

It's much simpler than that. If you hide the sun somehow (it doesn't matter how) then you will see the stars that are normally obscured by its glare. If the sun stays hidden, you would see a succession of different constellations rise and set. By the normal time of sunset, the Earth would have rotated to face the usual stars for the season.

Spectacled Bear.

Matt DeLuca — 07 Jul 2003, 20:31 · follows Spectacled Bear

huh?

BTW? Can someone please recap what the Miracle of Apu-Punchau was?

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Brandon Mason — 08 Jul 2003, 05:44 · follows Matt DeLuca

--- Matt DeLuca <archdragon at wotmania.com> wrote:

huh?

BTW? Can someone please recap what the Miracle of Apu-Punchau was?

Essentially, the Autocthons in the Stone Town in the past (before Severian becomes or meets Apu Punchau) are about to kill Severian, but they spare his life because the rising of the sun is delayed while he is telling them his story. I think I got that right. Someone correct me if I am wrong. Thus, the miracle of Apu Punchau. The afterword by Gene Wolfe explains that the miracle is possibly an eclipse of some sort, and leaves the reader to speculate on how it happened. A lot of people think the Heirodules ship blocked out the sun, but I am sure there are tons of other theories.

And I agree with whoever said that the skull that Severian finds while walking underwater is his own. Considering how many times Severian dies, its my opinion that Wolfe wouldn't have even included the detail about Severian finding the skull unless it was for sure his own.

Alice K. Turner — 08 Jul 2003, 03:48 · follows Brandon Mason

huh?

BTW? Can someone please recap what the Miracle of Apu-Punchau was?

The miracle of Apu-Punchau was an eclipse. Or a supposed eclipse; actually, as Wolfe makes (almost) clear in his afterword, it was the very large starship Sanru passing across the sun. This "miracle" echoes the one in Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court--which was a genuine eclipse. Wolfe is not so crass as to copy.

-alga

Don Palumbo — 08 Jul 2003, 20:55 · follows Alice K. Turner

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Of course, Wolfe is crass enough to copy, but he does it with such incredible style and intelligence, and never without giving it a twist of his own. BNS has Joseph Campbell's monomyth coming out its mouth, ears, nose, throat, and all its pores (and then just does it all over again in URS); but BNS is likely the most compelling and clever (and easily the most elaborate) reworking of this formula in SF, which is saying a lot, because some of the other SF reworkings (all six original DUNE books, THE STARS MY DESTINATION, and FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON among them) are among the best SF novels ever written. [btw, is this a coincidence? I don't think so.]

I am about to begin writing a long scholarly article on this--and probably won't be done writing it until the end of September or later. While it will be published in print, is there some way to eventually post it on this site (which I just joined recently) for anyone on this list who is interested to look at (and, hopefully, add their 2 cents worth to)?

--Don Palumbo

At 11:48 PM 7/7/03 -0400, Alice K. Turner wrote:

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Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 09 Jul 2003, 07:36 · follows Don Palumbo

On Tuesday, July 8, 2003, at 01:55 PM, Don Palumbo wrote:

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--Don Palumbo

Don (I am not the first Don) replies,

All writing is copying of some sort, and crassness isn't always a shortcoming. You could submit your article to Ultan's Library. I don't have the url but you can google it. Or maybe link it to the Lupine Nuncio. Again you must google.