

Piaton; apocalypse

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 26 Sep 2004

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Andrew Bollen — 26 Sep 2004, 19:08

Jeffrey's excellent "Valeria = Urth" post somehow made clear to me the symbolic aspect of Sev's destruction of Typhon by killing Piaton. Piaton surely represents the old Urth, innocent in itself but hopelessly infected with the old evils, which it will continue to breed and suffer from, until it is put out of its misery. Kind of a "doh" moment for not having seen it that way previously.

But there is a fundamental question about Sev's apocalypse which remains very unclear to me. How do Abaia and the others fit into this? Very simply, a global inundation isn't something which is going to cause them much grief; and indeed we see the undines leaping from the waves (or something like that) to greet the New Sun. Abaia etc definitely have a place in the post-apocalyptic world - just as The Mother has a place on Blue ("respect but do not worship", as Silk's final injunction to the community in New Viron puts it).

It may be that this was not Wolfe's intention in the first four books, but at least by the time he wrote UOTNS, these beings occupy a completely different space in the taxonomy of evil than creatures such as Typhon and the governess of the proto-Torturers' Tower. They survive, Typhon and the governess don't.

But why? Is a race of enslaved Ascians a better cosmic outcome than a race enslaved by Typhon? And to the extent that Abaia wants to enslave humans, won't this be much easier to accomplish with humanity reduced to a scattering of souls & returned to its primitive beginnings?

And you see something of the same puzzle in the different treatment of Typhon and Baldanders. To me it is clear enough that they are the "alpha" and "omega" of the same type - Sev first kills the original tyrant, and then comes down the mountain & deals with the new wannabe tyrant. But Baldanders doesn't perish, then or in the Flood (presumably).

Chris — 27 Sep 2004, 01:13 · follows Andrew Bollen

In response to Andrew's excellent post, some thoughts:

I don't have a precise answer about Abaia's place in the post-apocalyptic world, but I do have something like an argument, I suppose, based on what I consider to be the role of the Megatherians in Severian's story. This is obviously going to be arguable, and if you think there's nothing to it by all means say so, but it does make a great deal of sense to me, at least.

I would start by saying that there is a large difference between what Typhon is and what Abaia is, but that the two are solidly related to each other, akin to type-and-token, but not quite. The Megatherians, I would say, are more like ideas or ideologies. Thus, Typhon can stand in for the individual, the Stalin or Hitler, while Abaia would be something more like "totalitarianism" in the abstract. Some aspects of the Megatherians:

- 1) They are planted, "below the surface", and at least rhetorically speaking have or are the seeds of the destruction of human civilization.

- 2) They seem to grow over time, but aside from when they have their day in the sun (ie

Baldanders, during the time we get to see him), they are hidden and seem to exert their influence powerfully and *indirectly*.

3) The fact that the Ascians are influenced/enslaved by one of these Megatherians gives us a picture of what kind of idea these beings are. Baldanders and the kind of things you find in his castle provide another example.

There is also a distinct difference in how Baldanders and Typhon are treated by Wolfe, morally speaking - despite the fact that Severian ultimately fights them both. We have no trouble morally judging Typhon, he is the individual. Baldanders, on the other hand, presents himself as morally neutral, as if his actions were the work of an impersonal force or as if he were something to which morals do not properly pertain. Unfortunately I don't have a copy on hand, but it seems to me that the original story that Severian reads describing the origins of the Megatherians was also somewhat morally ambivalent... despite being objects of dread, I did not get the impression that they were "evil" in that story.

Ultimately I found that this helped me to reconcile the seeming inscrutability of their motives. If it seems difficult to figure out what they want, perhaps it is because they don't "want" anything at all - they simply act/influence according to their nature. The exception is Baldanders when he's still above the surface, and in that case he seems to act primarily to perpetuate himself.

So, did Abaia want the New Sun to come, or did he want to stop it? Did he help or hinder Severian? My guess is that the closest answer to the first is that he is indifferent to the prospect. That said, he may well have both helped *and* hindered Sev.

My wild guess about the original question is that, since Urth seems to have a cyclical history, Abaia may be gone when the "reset button" is pushed, but human nature being what it is, he'll be back someday. I am speculating that the undines are something more elementary, like Numena compared to Abaia as a more fully articulated mythological god/creature, and that they wouldn't be affected by the cataclysm - if anything, they would be more loose to play in simpler times (and minds).

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Jeff Wilson — 27 Sep 2004, 08:00 · in reply to Andrew Bollen

Andrew Bollen wrote:

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The flood may not be world-wide; indeed if the Increate is the God of the Old Testament, that would be in keeping with His promise not to destroy the world by water a second time. The undines may be momentarily flourishing because they are feasting on the creatures drowned by the flood of Gyll's basin.

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Not really; each pocket of the scattered and primitive survivors may be easier to control, but they have little or no reach to snare others. Instead of working from the top downward of a corrupted society, Abaia and agents would need to duplicate their efforts many times for little gain each time.

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Perhaps it is the grace of the Increate, or reflective of evil's tenacity. To have the flood simply wash away badness leaving only the good would imply destructive force is a simple and complete solution to moral issues. Or perhaps Baldanders and Abaia have some good in them worth saving. It could be that Abaia's forces are secretly on the side of good, grim doers of the regrettably necessary, like the angel of death at Passover, or Severian himself.

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 27 Sep 2004, 12:38 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Ummmm.

Ushas isn't just a flooded Urth; new continents (or old, long-sunken ones) rise. The impression I have is that in their arising, Abaia is forced above the surface of the water, where he can't live.

www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer
Propensity for the base

Roy C. Lackey — 27 Sep 2004, 20:39 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

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No, no. The flood is world-wide. That's the whole point of it. As Tzadkiel said to Severian:

"You are the New Sun. You will be returned to your Urth, and the White Fountain will go with you. The death agonies of the world you know will be offered to the Increate. And they will be indescribable -- continents will founder, as has been said. Much that is beautiful will perish, and with it most of your race; but your home will be reborn." (Urth, p-153)

And, on the same page:

"My son will see that you are returned to Briah and Urth, which will be destroyed at your order."

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 28 Sep 2004, 22:10 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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So the flood is so widespread as to make no difference. Hmm...the agonies being offered to the Increate suggests it is a non-divine party doing the destroying, but who?

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