

the Epitome

The Urth list — 19 messages, 12 voices, 02 Apr 2005

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4390>

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Roy C. Lackey — 02 Apr 2005, 01:00

Adam quoted Andrew and wrote:

Roy says inter alia:

As I've said earlier, the destruction of Urth was largely a symbolic punishment; symbolic because Urth was man's ancestral birthplace, and mankind was dispersed too far and wide in the galaxy (galaxies?) for the Hierogrammates to overcome entropy (135) and hit mankind all at once.

I feel that "symbolic" and "punishment" must both be wrong, somehow.

Agreed. As I read it, the punishment was placing the black hole in the Sun, and the New Sun is the lifting of that punishment. Tzadkiel's words to Severian at the "trial," and Aphet'a's words afterwards, make no sense if the coming of the New Sun is supposed to be a punishment.

We three seem to be in agreement that mankind was being punished. The difference is in the interpretation of the punishment. You see the punishment as being the wounding of the sun, and I agree. But the "lifting of that punishment" by bringing the New Sun is precisely what brought about "the destruction of Urth" that I mentioned. Had there been no black hole placed in the sun, there would have been no need of a white fountain to fix it.

It must be that Ushas is a necessary part of the Plan. And it must, somehow, be necessary for the victim to consent in the sacrifice, by the assent of Sev as Epitome.

I don't claim to know from the text why this should be the case, but if it isn't, I don't think the narrative makes any sense.

Again, I agree.

I agree that Ushas is part of the "Plan" by the Hierogrammates to "shape us now as they themselves were shaped; it is at once their repayment and their revenge." (CITADEL, 242) The H's had the power, as I showed in an earlier quote, to make new worlds and new suns. But they didn't do that. They went through the rigmarole of sending in a white fountain and washing away Urth as it was, to make a new beginning, such as happened in Noah's time. The act was largely symbolic because only Urth would be destroyed, not the tens of thousands of other worlds on which man resided. The Green Man was an evolutionary stage of the Plan that would culminate in the H's themselves.

(Personally, I find the idea of one person exemplifying the whole, and the idea of a Greater End requiring the death of multitudes, to

be quite repellant.

Once more, I agree.

Severian as Epitome is farcical. Most people on Urth would never even have heard of him. He was groomed, from before birth, to mindlessly obey whomever or whatever he was taught to regard as a higher authority than himself. When all the moral and ethical squirming stops, that comes down to 'might makes right'.

In the space of about six months, Sev went from a journeyman torturer raised in an artificially insulated corner of the Citadel, where he was woefully ignorant of just about everything on Urth, to Autarch of the Commonwealth. The ten years he held that position before leaving for Yesod were spent on busywork; nothing he did then mattered at all.

As for the "victim" consenting to the "sacrifice", well, yes. That brings me back to that quote about the "death agonies of the world you know will be offered to the Increate." I've said enough about that. And as I said on this list years ago, it was an easy sacrifice for Sev, as Epitome, to make, because he didn't make it. It cost him nothing. He got his face and his leg fixed. His nascent godling powers were augmented. Oh, he may have felt bad for an hour or two, about the mess he made on Urth and all the dead, but he got over it. It must have been awful for him, sitting on the beach on Ushas, writing his memoirs and watching the native girls adore him as a god and wait on him hand and foot. Life is tough for a scapegoat.

Just as there was no real "trial", the fight with the sailors afterwards was a charade, and for the same reason. Tzadkiel had already looked into the future and seen that Sev would bring the New Sun. He could not die in that fight if he was to bring the New Sun. Besides, Sev and Apheta had already conceived the New Sun before the mock trial or phony fight. It was already on its way to Urth.

The H's had no need or desire for a sacrificial victim; they are not the Increate. Their continued existence was not in jeopardy, no matter what happened on Urth, because they lived in Yesod. That stuff I quoted in an earlier post about "they shape us now as they themselves were shaped; it is at once their repayment and their revenge", is moot because they already exist. Unless they were just getting their kicks by exacting "revenge" for wrongs done them in a dead universe an unimaginable time ago, then they had no reason to be concerned with Urth.

I know that Apheta says that the H's wanted Sev to succeed because that strain of mankind born of Ushas might produce the Hieros, which would in turn shape the H's in Briah. But that doesn't change the fact that the H's already exist and live in Yesod. There is no practical point in endlessly repeating what has already been done in universe after universe. That's where the Increate comes in. They were doing his bidding. The goal was to improve and transform mankind "by some minute step" in each cycle into something nearer and dearer to the Increate, just as they themselves had been transformed by mankind into a race that was "united, compassionate, just." (CITADEL, 242)

-Roy

Matt Tillman — 05 Apr 2005, 17:18 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

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Roy C. Lackey — 05 Apr 2005, 23:22 · follows Matt Tillman

Matt Tillman wrote:

Sorry, cut out most of this because I just wanted to respond to one paragraph

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I know that Apheta says that the H's wanted Sev to succeed because that strain of mankind born of Ushas might produce the Hieros, which would in turn shape the H's in Briah. But that doesn't change the fact that the H's already exist and live in Yesod. There is no practical point in endlessly repeating what has already been done in universe after universe. That's where the Increate comes in. They were doing his bidding. The goal was to improve and transform mankind "by some minute step" in each cycle into something nearer and dearer to the Increate, just as they themselves had been transformed by mankind into a race that was "united, compassionate, just." (CITADEL, 242)

Why is it implausible that the H's are working along a non-linear timeline to prevent anything from forestalling their own development. Certainly, it could be said that if we could work outside of time and guide our lives from childhood, we might do things differently with all of that 20/20 hindsight.

Now imagine that we have more than 20/20 hindsight, because we operate on a different plane of existence than the creatures that we are gradually manipulating.<<

I don't know if my use of "H's" as shorthand for Hierogrammates is causing confusion with Hieros, or what. Anyway, to be clear, the Hieros were the humans of a previous universe who caused the eventual creation of the Hierogrammates. That creation was their great sin; a sin certainly in the eyes of the H's, but also, more importantly, in the eyes of the Increate.

As I've already said, the H's already exist, in Yesod, independent of any further Briah-like iterations of universes. Their development is not an issue. If they found their creation to have been such a painful ordeal that mankind had to be punished for it, why would they want to repeat it endlessly if they didn't have to? And they didn't have to.

Let me condense it this way: either the H's did what they did (mess with the Sun, drown Urth, manipulate mankind, etc.) with the consent of the Increate, or they didn't. That they did have that consent is what I have argued. To argue that they only thought they had that consent doesn't change anything; either they did or they didn't. The absence of divine sanction reduces the Pancreator to a spectator to events profoundly affecting his own Creation. From the Garden to Noah to the Christ, the Bible presents a decidedly contrary portrait of Divine Right.

If the H's had their own agenda -- regardless of what that agenda may have been -- and were operating without the blessing of the Increate, then they lack the moral authority to pass judgement on mankind. It's that simple. Without moral authority, the H's are just cosmic cowboys, hypocrites guilty of precisely the same sin for which mankind had been condemned. They can be neither "compassionate" nor "just", as Wolfe says of them.

Finally, if Wolfe didn't intend the destruction of Urth and the birth of Ushas to be, in a religious sense, a good thing, why did he write it that way? Why write it at all?

-Roy

Andrew Kertesz — 06 Apr 2005, 00:01 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

If the H's had their own agenda -- regardless of what that agenda may have been -- and were operating without the blessing of the Increate, then they lack the _moral authority_ to pass judgement on mankind. It's that simple. Without moral authority, the H's are just cosmic cowboys, hypocrites guilty of precisely the same sin for which mankind had been condemned . They can be neither "compassionate" nor "just", as Wolfe says of them.

In Melito's story, the angel admits that it can only guesses the will of the Increate - both the cock and the angel are infinitely far from Him.

With that in mind, isn't it possible to be wise and just, and also to work against the will of the Increate?

After all, we know that the Hierogrammates and Humans exchange places - in modifying the humans, the H's condemn themselves. Why shouldn't the destruction of Urth be part of the cycle?

Anyways, I think that the BotNS has more relevance as a story of personal redemption + discovery, not one of biblical floods and surges.

Chris — 06 Apr 2005, 00:06 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Hold up a second. This interpretation of the Hierodules/Hierogrammates is something that I find to be surprising, which is not to say it's incorrect necessarily, but this was not how I was seeing things. This may be a straightforward error on my part; I really ought to buy an electronic copy of the books if one is available just to look up things like this.

I thought that what you are calling the creation of the Hierogrammates was a "shaping", that is, the men of the previous universe influenced their development rather than created them from whole cloth. And in turn the Hierogrammates were influencing the humans of Severian's universe to return the favor. Rather than being a great sin I thought this was something that was supposed to elevate each in turn.

I don't know if my use of "H's" as shorthand for Hierogrammates is causing confusion with Hieros, or what. Anyway, to be clear, the Hieros were the humans of a previous universe who caused the eventual creation of the Hierogrammates. That creation was their great sin; a sin certainly in the eyes of the H's, but also, more importantly, in the eyes of the Increate.

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Iorwerth Thomas — 06 Apr 2005, 04:29 · in reply to Chris

From: "Chris" <rasputin_ at hotmail.com>

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Particularly if Wolfe intends (in some ways) to provide a critical analysis of (from a Christian perspective) of both the adequacies and inadequacies of an Old Testament approach to things. It'd thus be appropriate for there to be Christ imagery surrounding Severian, as in some ways he's an Old Testament prophetic figure, and thus (in some Christian views, I think) prefigures - or in this case, maybe postfigures him (off the cuff, I think Elijah or Elisha may be good analogues - despite the lack of bears eating unruly children in the narrative[1] - though I'll have to think about that, or possibly Joshua[2]).

In some sense, the whole thing could be an issue of Severian mistaking a renewed Earth for the Kindom of God. Or something.

The Long Sun/Short Sun books may be of some relevance to this - I'll have to reread the latter and finish reading the former, and think on that. If this tentative outline of preliminary possible theory survives the first round of criticism, of course... :)

Iorwerth

[1] In some ways a pity. I like bears, and think they should always be well fed.

[2] In the book of Joshua, the attainment of the Promised Land is achieved via genocide. Not the best start for a nation.

mournings glory — 06 Apr 2005, 11:08 · in reply to Iorwerth Thomas

Iorwerth-the-ursiphile writing:

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Do alzabos count?

Mr. Andre-Driussi argues in his _Lexicon_ and elsewhere* that the alzabo may be the "ghoul-bear" of Saint Anne, and young Severa, the daughter of Casdoe and Becan, is eaten by one.

(*Vide <http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/jlaidlow/ultan/lions.htm>)

msg

Roy C. Lackey — 06 Apr 2005, 13:12 · follows mournings glory

Chris wrote:

I thought that what you are calling the creation of the Hierogrammates was a "shaping", that is, the men of the previous universe influenced their development rather than created them from whole cloth. And in turn the Hierogrammates were influencing the humans of Severian's universe to return the favor. Rather than being a great sin I thought this was something that was supposed to elevate each in turn.

It's true that the H's were shaped by man; it's also true that the H's were doing unto man what had been done unto them. Man usurped the prerogative of the Increate, a great wrong, and in the process caused great suffering, which the H's never forgot. It makes no sense for the H's to keep repeating that wrong unless it is for a greater good than their own notions of revenge against the race that created them, a race they also are in awe of. That 'greater good', I maintain, is that the human race "advance my some minute step" with each repetition, to something nearer the desires of the Increate. And the H's might benefit also, I would add, by losing their awe of man and learning to revere the Increate.

I didn't want to have to do this, but maybe I should quote the whole relevant passage from chapter XXXIV of CITADEL.

These men encountered many beings on other worlds who had intelligence to some degree, or at least the potential for intelligence, and from them - that they might have comrades in the loneliness between the galaxies and allies among their swarming worlds - they formed beings like themselves.

It was not done swiftly or easily. Uncountable billions suffered and died under their guiding hands, leaving ineradicable memories of pain and blood. When their universe was old, and galaxy so far separated from galaxy that the nearest could not be seen even as faint stars, and the ships were steered thence by ancient records alone, the thing was done. Completed, the work was greater than those who began it could have guessed. What had been made was not a new race like humanity's, but a race such as humanity wished its own to be: united, compassionate, just.

I was not told what became of the Humanity of that cycle. Perhaps it survived until the implosion of the universe, then perished with it. Perhaps it evolved beyond our recognition. But the beings humanity had shaped into what men and women wished to be escaped, opening a passage to Yesod, the universe higher than our own, where they created worlds suited to what they had become.

From that vantage point they look both forward and back, and in so looking they have discovered us. Perhaps we are no more than a race like that who shaped them. Perhaps it was we who shaped them - or our sons - or our fathers. Malrubius said he did not know, and I believe he told the truth.

However it may be, they shape us now as they themselves were shaped; it is at once their repayment and their revenge.

The Hierodules they were found too, and formed more quickly, to serve them in this universe. On their instructions, the Hierodules construct such ships as the one that bore me from the jungle to the sea, so that aquastors like Malrubius and Triskele may serve them also. With these tongs, we are held in the forge.

The hammer they wield is their ability to draw their servants back, down the corridors of time, and to send them hurtling forward to the future. (This power is in essence

the same as that which permitted them to evade the death of their universe - to enter the corridors of time is to leave the universe.) On Urth at least, their anvil is the necessity of life: our need in this age to fight against an ever-more-hostile world with the resources of the depleted continents. Because it is as cruel as the means by which they themselves were shaped, there is a conservation of justice; but when the New Sun appears, it will be a signal that at last the earliest operations of the shaping are complete.

-Roy

maru — 07 Apr 2005, 15:20 · in reply to Chris

Chris wrote:

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True; Severian the Lame is not an uninterested party- the New Sun elevates him to levels of importance that couldn't help but gratify his ego, and he could simply be embarrassed at having been a little duped into it (ref those earlier passages about how the assassin's statements on the ship surprised him- did he really not realize what the New Sun would do to make Urth Ushas?), and further more he could well be retreating into that classic Christian's apologia/defense of a God permitting or doing evil- 'Don't question God/higher being; rather, have "faith" in their actions. All is for the best.'

~Maru

Adam Stephanides — 07 Apr 2005, 17:02 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

on 4/2/05 3:00 AM, Roy C. Lackey at rclackey at stic.net wrote:
Severian as Epitome is farcical. Most people on Urth would never even have heard of him. He was groomed, from before birth, to mindlessly obey whomever or whatever he was taught to regard as a higher authority than himself. When all the moral and ethical squirming stops, that comes down to 'might makes right'.

In the space of about six months, Sev went from a journeyman torturer raised in an artificially insulated corner of the Citadel, where he was woefully ignorant of just about everything on Urth, to Autarch of the Commonwealth. The ten years he held that position before leaving for Yesod were spent on busywork; nothing he did then mattered at all.

As for the "victim" consenting to the "sacrifice", well, yes. That brings me back to that quote about the "death agonies of the world you know will be offered to the Increate." I've said enough about that. And as I said on this list years ago, it was an easy sacrifice for Sev, as Epitome, to make, because he didn't make it. It cost him nothing. He got his face and his leg fixed. His nascent godling powers were augmented. Oh, he may have felt bad for an hour or two, about the mess he made on Urth and all the dead, but he got over it. It must have been awful for him, sitting on the beach on Ushas, writing his memoirs and watching the native girls adore him as a god and wait on him hand and foot. Life is tough for a scapegoat.

For that matter, the destruction of Urth doesn't cost the aquastors who fought with Severian anything, since they only exist inside Severian's head. There are only two real people who fight for the New Sun, and one of these has been indoctrinated from childhood to make this decision, as you pointed out.

Just as there was no real "trial", the fight with the sailors afterwards was a charade, and for the same reason. Tzadkiel had already looked into the future and seen that Sev would bring the New Sun. He could not die in that fight if he was to bring the New Sun.

I'm not sure this is quite accurate. I know Tzadkiel at the trial talks as if Sev's success is certain; but later Apheta says that Tzadkiel "had examined the future and found the chance high that you would bring a fresh sun to your Urth" (160; emphasis mine); and the mini-Tzadkiel by the brook tells Sev "you have not failed. You could have on the ship and later; but you couldn't die before the test, nor can you now, until your task is accomplished." (284; emphasis Wolfe's) The implication is that he could have indeed died during the test.

The H's had no need or desire for a sacrificial victim; they are not the Increate. Their continued existence was not in jeopardy, no matter what happened on Urth, because they lived in Yesod. That stuff I quoted in an earlier post about "they shape us now as they themselves were shaped; it is at once their repayment and their revenge", is moot because they already exist. Unless they were just getting their kicks by exacting "revenge" for wrongs done them in a dead universe an unimaginable time ago, then they had no reason to be concerned with Urth.

I know that Apheta says that the H's wanted Sev to succeed because that strain of mankind born of Ushas might produce the Hieros, which would in turn shape the H's in Briah. But that doesn't change the fact that the H's

already exist and live in Yesod. There is no practical point in endlessly repeating what has already been done in universe after universe. That's where the Increate comes in. They were doing his bidding. The goal was to improve and transform mankind "by some minute step" in each cycle into something nearer and dearer to the Increate, just as they themselves had been transformed by mankind into a race that was "united, compassionate, just." (CITADEL, 242)

Apheta says: "Your [Gunnies'] race and ours are, perhaps, no more than each other's reproductive mechanisms. You are a woman, and so you say you produce your ovum so that there will someday be another woman. But your ovum would say it produces that woman so that someday there will be another ovum. We have wanted the New Sun to succeed as badly as he [Sev] has wanted to himself. More urgently, in all truth. In saving your race he has saved ours; as we have saved ours of the future by saving yours." (UotNS, 159-60) This is after the New Sun's coming has been determined, so there is no reason why she would lie. The most straightforward interpretation of this is that the Ushas's strain of humanity will produce the "next generation" of Hierogrammates. Earlier, iirc, you argued that this can't be true, because the Hierogrammates, living in Yesod, are "outside time" and the birth-and-collapse cycle of Briah. But, while they can indeed (apparently) maneuver at will along the "corridors of time" in the current Briahitic universe, I don't recall any evidence that they are outside time in the sense that they are guaranteed to exist eternally, or that there can be no "next generation" of H's.

On the other hand, afaiK nobody ever claims that the Increate has ordered the New Sun to be brought, or Urth to be destroyed: neither Sev or the H's. If the Increate had indeed given such an order, you would think that the fact would be important enough for somebody to mention it. It seems especially odd that the H's would claim that they were killing millions of people out of self-interest if this wasn't the case.

(Granted, Wolfe deliberately (and pointlessly, to my mind) obfuscates this by suggesting in other places that the current humanity may produce the current Hierogrammates. But this complication doesn't affect the point currently at issue.)

--Adam

Adam Stephanides — 07 Apr 2005, 17:03 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

on 4/6/05 12:21 AM, Roy C. Lackey at rclackey at stic.net wrote:
I don't know if my use of "H's" as shorthand for Hierogrammates is causing confusion with Hieros, or what. Anyway, to be clear, the Hieros were the humans of a previous universe who caused the eventual creation of the Hierogrammates. That creation was their great sin; a sin certainly in the eyes of the H's, but also, more importantly, in the eyes of the Increate.

As far as I know, there is no evidence that the Increate considered the shaping of the Hierogrammates to be a sin. The Hieros' shaping of the Hierogrammates is spoken of in terms equivalent to the Hierogrammates' shaping of Sev's race into the next "generation" of Hieros. There's nothing to indicate that one is a sin and the other isn't, or that one had the blessing of the Increate and the other didn't.

Let me condense it this way: either the H's did what they did (mess with the Sun, drown Urth, manipulate mankind, etc.) with the consent of the Increate, or they didn't. That they did have that consent is what I have argued. To argue that they only thought they had that consent doesn't change anything; either they did or they didn't. The absence of divine sanction reduces the Pancreator to a spectator to events profoundly affecting his own Creation.

If the Increate is omnipotent and omniscient, as the Christian God is, then everything that happens must be part of his "plan" in some sense. But it doesn't follow that it all takes place at his order, or with his blessing. An act can be part of God's plan, and yet still be a sin: the Crucifixion is an obvious example (speaking from a Christian point of view).

From the Garden to Noah to the Christ, the Bible presents a decidedly contrary portrait of Divine Right.

In the first place, these examples are poor ones for your argument, since they don't show God preventing sin, merely punishing it afterwards. In the second place, as I said before, there's no evidence in the New Sun books of the Increate intervening directly in his creation at all. Even if you toss in the Long Sun and the Short Sun books, Wolfe's Increate is still far less interventionist than the God of the Old Testament.

If the H's had their own agenda -- regardless of what that agenda may have been -- and were operating without the blessing of the Increate, then they lack the _moral authority_ to pass judgement on mankind. It's that simple.

But the H's explicitly say that they have their own agenda. As I say in my other post, it's hard to see why they would claim to have their own agenda if they actually don't.

Without moral authority, the H's are just cosmic cowboys, hypocrites guilty of precisely the same sin for which mankind had been condemned. They can be neither "compassionate" nor "just", as Wolfe says of them.

Wolfe doesn't say it of them; Sev does.

Finally, if Wolfe didn't intend the destruction of Urth and the birth of Ushas to be, in a religious sense, a good thing, why did he write it that way? Why write it at all?

Wolfe does indeed surround the coming of the New Sun with a religious aura, which makes it hard for me to simply say that he intended us see it as immoral. But if by "in a religious sense, a good thing" you mean that it was done at the Increate's order, I've been arguing that Wolfe didn't write it that way, and I haven't yet seen anything to convince me otherwise. The hidden premise here seems to be that the destruction of Urth cannot be a good thing unless it was ordered by the Increate. But there seem to be a lot of people on this list who don't agree, or who at least give reasons why it's a good thing without mentioning the Increate's orders. Wolfe may well have seen things their way instead of yours.

--Adam

maru — 07 Apr 2005, 19:20 · in reply to Adam Stephanides

Adam Stephanides wrote:
on 4/6/05 12:21 AM, Roy C. Lackey at rclackey at stic.net wrote:

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Before we talk about what the Increate does and does not consider a sin (and what is up with that name? A naive reading of it would make me think of a pan-theist cosmology but I'm pretty sure that's not what Wolfe means.), let's establish whether there have been any communications whatsoever from the Increate.

As far as my imperfect knowledge goes, the Increate never conveys anything and we are told that in the story of the cock.

~Maru

Iorwerth Thomas — 08 Apr 2005, 03:15 · in reply to maru

From: maru <marudubshinki at gmail.com>

Reply-To: The Urth Mailing List <urth-urth.net at lists.urth.net>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth-urth.net at lists.urth.net>

Subject: Re: (urth) the Epitome

Date: Thu, 07 Apr 2005 22:20:20 -0400

Before we talk about what the Increate does and does not consider a sin (and what is up with that name? A naive reading of it would make me think of a pan-theist cosmology but I'm pretty sure that's not what Wolfe means.),

I think it may be a panentheistic set up (God permeates and transcends nature - hence the Increate refers to God active in Creation, the Pancreator refers to God transcending nature; analogies to Spinoza can probably be drawn here). Panentheism could be viewed as either the taking of certain aspects of classical theism or pantheism to their logical conclusion, or as a combination of aspects of the two (as in process theism). It might be what Wolfe means, but I'm unwilling to bet on it at this point.

Iorwerth

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Apr 2005, 13:12 · follows Iorwerth Thomas

Adam quoted me and wrote:

Just as there was no real "trial", the fight with the sailors afterwards was

a charade, and for the same reason. Tzadkiel had already looked into the future and seen that Sev would bring the New Sun. He could not die in that fight if he was to bring the New Sun.

I'm not sure this is quite accurate. I know Tzadkiel at the trial talks as if Sev's success is certain; but later Apheta says that Tzadkiel "had examined the future and found the chance high that you would bring a fresh sun to your Urth" (160; emphasis mine); and the mini-Tzadkiel by the brook tells Sev "you have not failed. You could have on the ship and later; but you couldn't die before the test, nor can you now, until your task is accomplished." (284; emphasis Wolfe's) The implication is that he could have indeed died during the test.

Yes, that is the implication, and Wolfe obviously intended it be read that way. I was aware of Apheta's statement of probability. But Tzadkiel (who outranks her [g]), is unequivocal, saying "you have already passed our testing, which was an examination of the future you will create." Not "might create if you survive the next few minutes of battle." If Sev had died in that

fight, Tzadkiel could not have looked into the future and determined that Sev would be the New Sun. The fortune-telling was over with before Sev ever set foot in the Hall of Justice; that's why he was there. As Apheta told him "Time runs as we ask here . . ." (142) They had all eternity, apparently, as many manvantaras as it took, from their base in Yesod, to get it right. They got it right, or at least got the result they were looking for in the future of Sev's Bria. That or the Increate ought to fire the whole damn bunch for unbelievable incompetence.

As for why Wolfe included the theoretical possibility of Sev's death in the fight with the sailors, I can only speculate. But I'd rather not, as it will only lead to more religious arguments.

But, just for the sake of argument, suppose Sev _had_ been killed in the fight. What then? Would the H's just polish their halos and take up the harp? Game over? No further pursuit of their ultimate goal (whether that goal was their own or the Increate's)? In other words, would Sev's death in a brawl really change anything, in the long view? No. The H's would just wait for the next manvantara and try again. With the ability to scan time from one end of a universe to the other, and to manipulate outcomes, they held all the high cards -- except the Joker.

Tzadkiel, as Zak, even left his "demanding" duties to board the Ship before it ever reached Yesod, so he could rub elbows with, and bask in the shadow of, the holy Conciliator, aka the New Sun, Sev. (152) If Sev had not been that Conciliator, Zak would have been wasting his time. If Sev had died in the fight, he could not have become the Conciliator. It was all a game, the outcome predetermined.

Apheta says: "Your [Gunnies'] race and ours are, perhaps, no more than each other's reproductive mechanisms. You are a woman, and so you say you produce your ovum so that there will someday be another woman. But your ovum would say it produces that woman so that someday there will be another ovum. We have wanted the New Sun to succeed as badly as he [Sev] has wanted to himself. More urgently, in all truth. In saving your race he has saved ours; as we have saved ours of the future by saving yours." (UotNS, 159-60) This is after the New Sun's coming has been determined, so there is no reason why she would lie. The most straightforward interpretation of this is that the Ushas's strain of humanity will produce the "next generation" of Hierogrammates.

Agreed.

Earlier, iirc, you argued that this can't be true, because the Hierogrammates, living in Yesod, are "outside time" and the birth-and-collapse cycle of Bria. But, while they can indeed (apparently) maneuver at will along the "corridors of time" in the current Briahtic universe, I don't recall any evidence that they are outside time in the sense that they are guaranteed to exist eternally, or that there can be no "next generation" of H's.

I did imply that there could be "next generation" H's as well as humans in a post subsequent to the one you are quoting here, the one where I gave that long quote.

On the other hand, afaik nobody ever claims that the Increate has ordered the New Sun to be brought, or Urth to be destroyed: neither Sev or the H's. If the Increate had indeed given such an order, you would think that the fact would be important enough for somebody to mention it. It seems especially odd that the H's would claim that they were killing millions of people out of self-interest if this wasn't the case.

And in a second post Adam wrote:

But the H's explicitly say that they have their own agenda. As I say in my other post, it's hard to see why they would claim to have their own agenda if they actually don't.

Without moral authority, the H's are just cosmic cowboys, hypocrites guilty of precisely the same sin for which mankind had been condemned. They can be neither "compassionate" nor "just", as Wolfe says of them.

Wolfe doesn't say it of them; Sev does.

Finally, if Wolfe didn't intend the destruction of Urth and the birth of Ushas to be, in a religious sense, a good thing, why did he write it that way? Why write it at all?

Wolfe does indeed surround the coming of the New Sun with a religious aura, which makes it hard for me to simply say that he intended us see it as immoral. But if by "in a religious sense, a good thing" you mean that it was

done at the Increate's order, I've been arguing that Wolfe didn't write it that way, and I haven't yet seen anything to convince me otherwise. The hidden premise here seems to be that the destruction of Urth cannot be a good thing unless it was ordered by the Increate. But there seem to be a lot

of people on this list who don't agree, or who at least give reasons why it's a good thing without mentioning the Increate's orders. Wolfe may well have seen things their way instead of yours.

I gather that you want to keep the Increate out of the equation. Okay, then _what_ was the goal of generations of refinement of both humans and H's, from the H's perspective? Whence the moral high-horse they rode in on? Who handed them the reins of Justice, allowing them to pass judgement on Urth and, ultimately, all of mankind? Did they take that function upon themselves? What hubris!

Earlier in this same post Adam wrote:

If the Increate is omnipotent and omniscient, as the Christian God is, then everything that happens must be part of his "plan" in some sense. But it doesn't follow that it all takes place at his order, or with his blessing.

An act can be part of God's plan, and yet still be a sin: the Crucifixion is

an obvious example (speaking from a Christian point of view).

If the H's were simply unwitting instruments in God's plan, more's the pity (from a Christian viewpoint). Judas' kiss was such an act, which you have, in essence, labeled a sin. If the H's acted without the blessing of the Increate, then they were sinners such as man has never seen on Urth, and beyond. Nothing that Adam and Eve or Typhon ever did could begin to compare. The H's have god-like powers and only entropy, it seems, can even slow them down. And even that can be got around by just waiting in Yesod for the next Big Bang in Briah.

And it makes Sev-the-Conciliator the dupe of a race of beings neither he nor anyone else have even a hope of thwarting. I just don't think that's the story Wolfe wrote, or at least intended, to write.

-Roy

Alan Lewis — 09 Apr 2005, 05:41 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

And then Severian said, "I must believe in free will. I have no choice."

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 09 Apr 2005, 05:52 · follows Alan Lewis

Roy says:

But, just for the sake of argument, suppose Sev _had_ been killed in the fight. What then? Would the H's just polish their halos and take up the harp? Game over? No further pursuit of their ultimate goal (whether that goal was their own or the Increate's)? In other words, would Sev's death in a brawl really change anything, in the long view? No. The H's would just wait for the next manvantara and try again. With the ability to scan time from one end of a universe to the other, and to manipulate outcomes, they held all the high cards -- except the Joker.

Would they have to wait for a new cycle? By the time of the trial, Sev is an eidolon, created on the ship after he died encased in Sidero. It was at that point Tzadkiel set the New Sun on its way, I believe.

"The winged woman of Father Inire's book awaited me in the wings. Her hands she clapped once, formally, as a great lady summons her maid. As they parted there appeared between them a point of white light, hot and flaming. It seemed to me that it was my own face, and my face a mask that stared into it." (p65)

If Sev the eidolon had died in the battle in Yesod, why not just make a new eidolon and try again, until the they got the right outcome?

Roy C. Lackey — 09 Apr 2005, 23:52 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Thalassocrat wrote:

If Sev the eidolon had died in the battle in Yesod, why not just make a new eidolon and try again, until the they got the right outcome?

Logically, there is no reason not to. In fact, they did make a new eidolon again when Sev died back in Apu's era. Venant's death was also logically meaningless; if the Hierogrammates could, in effect, bring humans back to life, they could do the same for their own kind. But this story isn't about reason -- it's about religion.

That's why I've maintained throughout that the destruction of Urth and the birth of Ushas was largely symbolic. The H's told Sev there were but two choices -- the New Sun or the ice future for Urth. If Sev died in the brawl there would be no New Sun. If the H's were to be held to their word (and who but the Increate could bind them?), and Sev had been killed by the ice-future faction of sailors in that post-"trial" brawl, then they would have been obliged to abide by the advertised rules of their own game to leave Urth to its long, slow decline. That or they were lying. And if they lied about that fundamental tenet, then everything about them is suspect, and Wolfe's story falls flat.

That's why, at a minimum, they would "have to wait for a new cycle".

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Apr 2005, 12:38 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I think not enough is being done to ask what is meant by the Hieros in describing Severian as the "epitome." To my mind it means that he is the most fully human in some sense.

--Dan'l

You probably do not want to know what that odor is.
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

David Duffy — 12 Apr 2005, 16:51 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Mon, 11 Apr 2005, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
I think not enough is being done to ask what is meant by the Hieros in describing Severian as the "epitome." To my mind it means that he is the most fully human in some sense.

--Dan'l

Well, the Dryden quote was included in the 1913 Merriam Webster dictionary definition (but I don't know if that is true of the OED or SOD, which I believe is Wolfe's preference -- definitely the pun on Apheta only works using the SOD):

A man so various, that he seem'd to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome:

continuing:

Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
Was every thing by starts, and nothing long;
But, in the course of one revolving moon,
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon:
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.

Perhaps overinterpretation, but I thought the Greek gloss of epitome "cut into/onto/upon" and perhaps even its meaning 1. an "abridgement" might have made it attractive too.

David Duffy,