

'Doomed' multitudes

The Urth list — 14 messages, 5 voices, 03 Apr 2005

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4394>

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Tony Ellis — 03 Apr 2005, 03:21

I wrote, on the subject of Severian's victims being doomed:

No, they weren't. The multitudes would have continued to live their ordinary lives if Severian hadn't drowned them all.

Maru wrote:

On a dying planet. With the most dehumanizing gov.'t ever conceived poised to take over their lives, liberties, minds (Abaia & co. ?) quite literally.

Abaia and co have **always** been poised to over the commonwealth. They were poised when Severian left to be Tested, and when he comes back 70-odd years later the commonwealth is still there. We're even told that Valeria's second marriage was a good thing because while she could take care of the commonwealth 'he could take care of the Ascians.'

Baldanders says: "The armies of Erebus follow the waves, and all the defeats they suffered at your husband's hands will be avenged." In what way does 'all the defeats they suffered at your husband's hands' suggest Abaia and co were poised to take over anything?

Gunnie and the other sailors are shown both futures. If the Frozen Urth future involves being horribly taken over by Abaia and co and everyone being doomed, nobody mentions it. A lot of the sailors think it's a future worth fighting for.

Nothing Master Ashe says suggests Abaia and co taking over either. If anything he seems to think they're running out of options.

I am curious as to what your life is like if you can consider that 'ordinary'.

Oh, come off it. What constitutes an 'ordinary life' is entirely relative to time and place. The lives of the everyday people of the commonwealth Severian meets are ordinary for the people living them. I don't recall many of them saying "Wow, our lives are just so doomed and awful, aren't they? I wish a big wave would come along and drown me and everyone I love."

I wrote:

Since a planet does have to be drowned to realise the potential of a handful of survivors in the New Sun future, I think that's more important.

Maru wrote:

Not just a handful. A handful prolifically reproducing to repopulate the planet.

A 'handful' which will persist throughout periods of time that if you even apprehended a smidgen of their yawning aeons...

That's still a handful, Maru. In the Frozen Urth future handfuls, at the very least, are taken to new worlds where they can reproduce with quite the same degree of hyperbole.

Getting the idea of how many people have a chance to live should Severian choose to sacrifice a few?

Getting the idea that just as many, if not more, will live if he doesn't sacrifice anyone at all?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 03 Apr 2005, 09:52 · in reply to Tony Ellis

I've been too busy (and still am) to comment on this thread; but...

It seems to me that a bit of light might be shed on the whole subject by attending to the Biblical concept, of

the remnant. This is a recurring theme throughout:

the idea that though Mankind or Israel sins, and God chastises, He always brings forth a remnant to carry on. This applies to the sons of Noah, to the Benjaminites, to the returnees from the Babylonian Exile, and in smaller ways to many other things. You find the theme all through the prophetic books of the Bible.

I suspect strongly that Wolfe has this theme in mind, though perhaps not consciously.

--Dan'l

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

maru — 03 Apr 2005, 11:36 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

I've been too busy (and still am) to comment on this thread; but...

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I suspect strongly that Wolfe has this theme in mind, though perhaps not consciously.

--Dan'l

I personally suspect, since the remnant is always 'more pure' than the previous population, this is merely natural fall out of the 'us vs them' way of thinking, where 'us' is always smaller than 'them'. Fires up the ol' zealotry spirit even in cases where thinking so is absurd. (Witness how Christians in the US feel presecuted!) That, and 'we were spared, so God must like us better!'.

But Wolfe is not alone- look at Jordan's WOT series, and tell me if you can't see it there as well.

~Maru

James Wynn — 03 Apr 2005, 22:40 · in reply to maru

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'more pure' than the previous population, this is merely
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Hmmmm

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"Us vs Them" thinking rears its ugly head in a most ironic way. :-)

~ Crush

maru — 04 Apr 2005, 18:19 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

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~ Crush

/me is disquieted; cannot reasonably parse & interpret above statement. Is it a cogent agreement and amplification of the foregoing? An especially ironic and subtle dig at the author of the foregoing? Something else even diabolical and intricate, ramping even further up the dizzying infinite insane meta-levels of post-modern irony and epistolary techniques?

/me head asplodes.

~Maru

James Wynn — 05 Apr 2005, 10:46 · in reply to maru

Crush wrote:

"Us vs Them" thinking rears its ugly head in a most ironic way. :-)

An especially ironic and subtle dig at the author of
the foregoing?

That's the one, but more so at the concept that "us vs them" thinking can be tagged to a particular category of the human race or to a philosophic category. "Us vs Them" thinking is endemic to positively holding a point of view. I have the same reaction to this as the claim that there is something "dangerous" about "people who believe they are right" (which would suggest that there is something dangerous about people who seriously believe that there is something

dangerous about people who believe they are right).

~ Crush

maru — 05 Apr 2005, 17:33 · in reply to Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis wrote:

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I recollect the Undines said that they could have, at any moment taken the Commonwealth but they forebore, to try and stop the New Sun. I find one of the interesting things in Urth of the New Sun is how Abaia & co are portrayed in a far more sympathetic light- they fight on the side of the sailors to let Urth die a slow death, than a violent rebirth. 70-odd years later the Commonwealth is still there because as Severian says, the 'time when my death could have prevented the coming of the New Sun was past', and Sev didn't have to fear assassination at their hands anymore.

Baldanders says: "The armies of Erebus follow the waves, and all the defeats they suffered at your husband's hands will be avenged." In what way does 'all the defeats they suffered at your husband's hands' suggest Abaia and co were poised to take over anything?

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The sailors are shown the consequence of the New Sun fork, not the Ice Urth fork.

Nothing Master Ashe says suggests Abaia and co taking over either. If anything he seems to think they're running out of options.

More evidence that they sought the wrong fork in the path- shows that even their desired end of a slowly freezing Urth dooms them and their progeny.

I am curious as to what your life is like if you can consider that 'ordinary'.

Oh, come off it. What constitutes an 'ordinary life' is entirely relative to time and place. The lives of the everyday people of the commonwealth Severian meets are ordinary for the people living them. I don't recall many of them saying "Wow, our lives are just so doomed and awful, aren't they? I wish a big wave would come along and drown me and everyone I love."

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Please explain to me how you can say that N worlds of people (where N represents the totality of worlds colonized by man, including a revitalized Urth/Ushas) could possibly only equal or be less (!) than N-1 worlds of people.

~Maru

Chris — 05 Apr 2005, 17:53 · in reply to maru

That's actually not a difficult question at all; in fact it *seems* so obvious how he "can say" it that I won't bother to try to answer it. Instead I'll ask a more productive question:

Why are you using "worlds" as a unit of measurement instead of individual human lives?

Related: What kind of perspective would it require to make this a valid way to measure?

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~Maru

maru — 05 Apr 2005, 18:10 · in reply to Chris

...

You know what I mean.

But the reason I am using worlds as a measurement is that that is the simplest way of saying it. I could say something along the lines of all these 'containers' are necessarily the same size and so you couldn't separate into six containers; or I could say something along the lines that if you take Urth out of the picture you have irrevocably reduced the future potential of the worlds of man, and this

reduced potential will more than outweigh the people spared a New Sun. And so on.

The perspective that makes this a valid way of measuring is a long-term, universal viewpoint, which treats all humans as equal.

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Tony Ellis — 07 Apr 2005, 01:32 · follows Chris

Maru wrote

I recollect the Undines said that they could have, at any moment taken the Commonwealth but they forebore, to try and stop the New Sun.

What Joturna says is that Abaia "might have destroyed you... In a day, or a few days. He's sought to tame you instead." UOTNS, XLIII.

Destroyed, not taken. Abaia wants humanity alive.

The sailors are shown the consequence of the New Sun fork, not the Ice Urth fork.

"Zak showed us that Urth had two futures... It could die and be born new. Or it could go on living for a long time before it died forever." UOTNS, XXII

Tzadkiel the Just shows the sailors that humanity drowns in one future, but omits to mention that it is equally doomed in the other? Doesn't sound very likely to me.

But this is all by the by. Nowhere in the books does it say that in the Frozen Urth future humanity is enslaved by Abaia. Nowhere does it say that branch of humanity is doomed. It says, quite categorically, that life goes on.

Please explain to me how you can say that N worlds of people (where N represents the totality of worlds colonized by man, including a revitalized Urth/Ushas) could possibly only equal or be less (!) than N-1 worlds of people.

Because any attempt to predict which future will ultimately colonise the most worlds is pointless speculation. The Green Men may eventually decide Urth is so sacred they don't live on it at all. The Frozen Urth people may build 50,000 ringworlds each with the surface area of a thousand Urths. Rather more probably, both races will at some point decide that they don't actually want to fill the universe to capacity like mindless animals at all, and control their populations accordingly.

This is precisely why measuring what the New Sun achieves in terms of future generations is a non-starter, as I've been saying for some time now. The people on this list who suggest that it is worthwhile because it may bring about the Hierogrammates at least have an argument.

maru — 07 Apr 2005, 15:08 · in reply to Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis wrote:

Maru wrote

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Destroyed, not taken. Abaia wants humanity alive.

Remember, Abaia and Erebus already own the rest of Urth (apparently; at least we hear of noone else resisting them, and so it is reasonable they have all come to an 'understandin'. And That they own the rest of the world is reasonable when you posit that they are modelled after the Soviet Union and the circumstances of the Cold War. Didn't the whole thing with approved texts and the Ascians remind you of 1984?). They want the Commonwealth intact... why? Why is it necessary that the Commonwealth be 'tamed'? I think it is because the rest of the worlds of man and the Hs see the Commonwealth as the legitimate speaker for Urth and so if Abaia and co want a speaker for Urth who will choose an Ice future, they must not raze the Commonwealth to the ground like they could, but as I said take it intact and via more subtle and inefficient means. Sev says as much a few times.

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Sev says during the Flood that makes Ushas something to the effect 'So this is what the sailors saw.' and agrees with their choice.

But this is all by the by. Nowhere in the books does it say that in the Frozen Urth future humanity is enslaved by Abaia. Nowhere does it say that branch of humanity is doomed. It says, quite categorically, that life goes on.

No, it says that life will go on for a little while, and then they will all die, forever.

Please explain to me how you can say that N worlds of people (where N represents the totality of worlds colonized by man, including a revitalized Urth/Ushas) could possibly only equal or be less (!) than N-1 worlds of people.

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May, may may... (How could the Frozen Urthers build any Dyson rings? It is all they can do to import a few cannons, much less engage in mega-engineering projects. The future of a Frozen Urth is one of **irreversible** decline. If they cannot at the time of BOTNS make a ring, they will not be able to in the future.)

Humanity may be murdered tomorrow, and so leaving a world my descendants can live in tomorrow is utterly irrelevant to any decisions I may make!

The Urth may be swallowed by a hidden, undetectable black hole the bday after tomorrow, therefor let us make decisions only with regard to us!

If we cannot be sure of anything, let us do nothing!

If it is not 100% certain that our food shall not infect us with tiny alien parasites which will feed off us and burst messily out of our chests, let us not eat at all!

This is precisely why measuring what the New Sun achieves in terms of future generations is a non-starter, as I've been saying for some time now. The people on this list who suggest that it is worthwhile because it may bring about the Hierogrammates at least have an argument.

But the Hierogrammates have already been brought about...

~Maru

Chris — 07 Apr 2005, 15:30 · in reply to maru

Maru said:

No, it says that life will go on for a little while, and then they will all die, forever.

This point has already been discussed a few times in this thread, and what you seem to be implying here seems to be ignoring that.

Also, that sentence is... well, just look at it.

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If I am not misunderstanding things here, it sounds like you are battering a straw man here. I don't think he was suggesting not making any choices at all. What he was suggesting was that evaluating "future generations" was not a sound basis for making that choice.

And that's arguable. Just not on the terms you're presenting here.

maru — 07 Apr 2005, 19:17 · in reply to Chris

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Well c'mon. That's practically a direct quote, which I didn't bring in, mind you. Someone else brought up the UOTNS quote to the effect that 'they will live a long time, then die forever', about Urth's choices. (Not the worlds of man, if that's what you thought I was referring to. The H's cannot do it for all the worlds but only Urth- or so we think.)

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But if you trying to evaluate on basis of human happiness, you must take into consideration future generations, to not do so vastly magnifies your current generations rightful share of the pie.

~Maru

Chris — 09 Apr 2005, 00:14 · in reply to maru

Measuring by worlds is at best one step removed from what you're really trying to get at. There are hidden premises required which can at best be contingently true, if that. For one thing, to make "worlds" be the limiting factor it would require that humans find and eventually fill to capacity all available worlds. For another thing, why couldn't the planet be "rehabilitated" after the ice future comes to pass and repopulated by human cultures that left earlier? All they need is enough science to whip themselves up a white fountain.

This perspective perhaps treats all humans as equal, but just in the sense of being equally

valueless. No number of presently existing human beings, no matter how large, is capable of outweighing infinite "potential" future generations. Actual human beings, in this view, can count for nothing.

On another note, I think that to some extent we are not thinking of Urth as just a planet like any other. Through the framing device of the play, we are at some level being led to treat Urth as a sort of microcosm. Its death and rebirth are in some way treated as the death and rebirth of *everything*. I'm not sure if this sort of allegory should be attributed to Wolfe, or if it would be better to attribute it to Severian.

...

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