

Urth before Earth

The Urth list — 18 messages, 7 voices, 18 Jul 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4662>

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b sharp — 18 Jul 2006, 16:38

When I first read Shadow of the Torturer back in the 80's, like many I first thought it was set in our past. Later with references to anti-gravity, interstellar travel, polychrome sand and endless depths of archaeology it was clear the story was set far in our future. But why change the spelling of our planet to Urth?

I have come to think that the spelling is to indicate that Urth is not our Earth but a similar planet in a future (not past) time frame, perhaps in Yesod.

I think of Yesod being in the future of Briah because you have to travel to the end of the Briah, end of time (big collapse, final black hole?) to reach the beginning of Yesod (big bang, white fountain?). I think time in Wolfe's universes is arranged in a spiral (hence the Hiero's preference for that shape) allowing shortcuts to bridge between the coils, between one universe and another.

The key piece of evidence for Earth being in Urth's future starts with The Last House. The structure and function of this place is clear: You travel a labyrinthine path exactly and reach a vertical structure. You can't find the place if you don't follow the path exactly. The bottom floors of this structure are earlier in time and the top floors are progressively in the future.

At the end of Citadel of the Autarch, Severian can't find the Atrium of Time until he follows a marked path exactly. The Atrium itself isn't a time travelling structure (nor does time stand still there, the seasons change). But the Atrium is surrounded by towers and surely there is time travel available in them. The towers are guarded by four sorts of extinct beasts, Glyptodons (gigantic heavy-armored armadillo), Barylambdas (1500 lbs. pig-like creature), Arctothurs (giant bear) and Smilodons (sabre-tooth tiger). I will speculate that the speed of each animal might denote the amount of time travel each tower provides but that is just a guess. (I see evidence that Ultan's Library and the Naviscaput's lair are also time traversing structures.)

Valeria lives in one of the towers and her antique appearance may result from her residing in the lower levels. In fact, she has never gone to the upper levels of her tower where I am pretty sure you can find the Path Of Air to the House Absolute. (more evidence for that someday, when I try to present my ideas on Severian's family tree)

Another labyrinthine path leading to a vertical structure can be found in the Jungle Room of the Botanic Gardens. In fact, when Mannea gives Severian a map to find The Last House, Severian thinks of the Jungle Hut for no explained reason. In the Jungle Hut, Severian sees people who are apparently from Earth. An Earth book (Bible) is quoted from and we see a yellow sun and an airplane. Following the pattern of The Last House, if Earth was in the past, Severian should have to descend to find a view of it.

Since he ascends, Earth must be in the future of Urth. But since Earth is at a much earlier technological stage than Urth, it must exist in another universe or time frame. Some evidence points to Yesod.

The only other place I know of in BoTNS where an Earth book is quoted is L. Carroll's *Through The Looking Glass*, in the Antechamber, by Jonas. Jonas knows the real story of Theseus, Kim Lee Soong is familiar, so Jonas must be from Earth. His shipmates also. A normal spaceship couldn't return him to where he came from but Father Inire's mirrors could, traversing space and time.

The only things we see appearing in Father Inire's mirrors are a (Christian?) silvery fish and the angelic Tzadkiel. Since everything in Yesod looks sort of heavenly, I tend to think Inire's mirrors are a path to Yesod, which is where Jonas wants to go. So..I think Earth is in Yesod and in Urth's future.

-bsharp

p.s. I submitted these ideas in an essay to Ultan's Library but they weren't interested. So, UL readers must make do with the last entrant there, Mantis' Lions, Tigers, Bears from 2003. I have a lot of respect for Mantis' scholarship (who doesn't?) but I can't say I easily accept the view that the Jungle Sorcerers and Master Ash are symbolic bear guardians nor that tigers and bears in the Atrium of Time are addressed but glyptodons and barylambdas are ignored.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 18 Jul 2006, 18:22 · in reply to b sharp

On 7/18/06, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
When I first read *Shadow of the Torturer* back in the 80's, like many I first thought it was set in our past. Later with references to anti-gravity, interstellar travel, polychrome sand and endless depths of archaeology it was clear the story was set far in our future. But why change the spelling of our planet to Urth?

To indicate that it is not our Earth. You're right there. However, what appears* to be the case is that it is "our Earth" in a previous cycle of the Universe, but in the far future (in that cycle) by comparison with where we are in the current cycle. That is, Urth at the time of Severian is a billion years or so older than Earth at the time of Gene Wolfe. (There is argument about this, and some have claimed as little as a thousand years, which I find quite implausible.)

* Where "appears" is roughly equivalent to "Wolfe has said as much."

I think of Yesod being in the future of Briah because you have to travel to the end of the Briah, end of time (big collapse, final black hole?) to reach the beginning of Yesod (big bang, white fountain?).

Interesting ... I thought it was just because the universal singularity at the moment between cycles is the only place where you can actually break out of Briah and into Yesod (or, at least, the easiest place).

I think time in Wolfe's universes is arranged in a spiral (hence the Hiero's preference for that shape)

I agree with the arrangement. I had somehow thought of the Heiros' spirals as related to DNA. But this makes sense.

allowing shortcuts to bridge between the coils, between one universe and another.

What is (I think) spiral is the cycle of Briah. Yesod and Briah, however, are separate issues: they are (if I'm not mistaken) branches of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

The only other place I know of in BoTNS where an Earth book is quoted is L. Carroll's *Through The Looking Glass*, in the Antechamber, by Jonas. Jonas knows the real story of Theseus, Kim Lee Soong is familiar, so Jonas must be from Earth.

... or from a much earlier point in the history of Urth, depending on just how exact the cycles are...

The only things we see appearing in Father Inire's mirrors are a (Christian?) silvery fish and the angelic Tzadkiel. Since everything in Yesod looks sort of heavenly, I tend to think Inire's mirrors are a path to Yesod, which is where Jonas wants to go. So..I think Earth is in Yesod and in Urth's future.

Earth is definitely in Urth's future. The unique event called the Incarnation happens in the Earth-cycle, and has not yet happened in the Urth-cycle.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.

However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson

b sharp — 20 Jul 2006, 05:27 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Well, I am in the minority (probably a minority of one) in thinking Earth might reside in Yesod and that Yesod is the future of Briah, so I am probably wrong about that. Wouldn't be the first time.

Tony Ellis' objection is that in Citadel:

Severian calls Yesod "the universe higher than our own". 'Higher' is an odd word to use if all he meant was 'in the future of our own', and since there are a perhaps infinite number of future flowerings of our universe, he should rather have said "_a_ universe higher than our own".

Well, first I don't think we can rely on Severian, pre-Yesod trip, to be much of a cosmological expert but to me that statement is just a recognition that Yesod is a stage further, just as fuligin is _the_ color darker than black. I suppose there could be an infinite number of colors progressively darker than black but they are beyond human perception or consideration. Likewise any universe further in the future than Yesod is beyond comprehension to someone from Briah. "Fuligin is _a_ color darker than black" ? Doesn't resonate, I think.

All this made me want a certain passage from Urth of the New Sun and I did find it:

Severian notes there are more stars in the sky of planet Yesod than in Urth's sky. Apheta replies:

"When we require them, the Hierogrammates will build more---, worlds as fair as this or more fair. >Suns for them too, should we require more suns. Thus for us they are there already. Time runs as >we ask here, and we like their light".

It was this passage that originally made me think that Severian travelled to the end (of time) of Briah and arrived in the beginning of Yesod, still under construction. So Earth will be created, in Yesod, far in the future of Apheta, and in the image of Urth.

Did the Hierogrammates or some similar race construct Briah? Or is it a direct product of natural forces, i.e. The Increate? Can this difference between Briah and Yesod be explained Kabbalistically?

I like Dan'l's statement that:

One could as easily ask of Christianity, "What was the point of all the rises and falls, the triumphs >and sufferings, of the nation of Israel?" From the Christian standpoint, it appears to have been "to >prove that fallen humanity is not perfectable without the direct intervention of the Increate, that >even a perfect Law can not save humanity, only grace." Could a similar demonstration be going on >here on a grand scale, one appropriate to Hiero-beings whose schemes cross the boundaries from >one cycle of Briah to the next?

But if Yesod is reserved for Hieros, while Briah and all its residents are just destroyed, their atoms or quarks just get collapsed and big banged into another Briah, then where is the reward? Where is the heaven? Where does grace and salvation take you?

A step closer to God? Well, then that should be Yesod, yes? If you make spiritual advancement you (or your cognate race) become God(s) in the next leve. In Wolfe's scheme perhaps we, on Earth, can also advance and move to that level above Yesod? What we call "heaven" and another step closer to God. (hm...why is only Tzadkiel named as a Hierogrammate? avoiding polytheism?).

Dan'l feels that concerning names used in BotNS, Wolfe:

"carefully considered the historical and mythological significance of every
other person, place,
and thing"

I can't agree with this. The most obvious counter-example for me is his use of Saint names. Except for Saint Dorcas being resurrected, I can't find any significance in his choices for the names of human Commonwealth residents (with the exception of kaibits having diminutive names). They seem picked from a list.

Brings up a pet peeve of mine which is the assumed omnipotence of Gene Wolfe. That his work contains unsolvable mysteries. His intelligence and knowledge are far greater than mine but I can't accept that the combined wisdom and problem solving skills of many intelligent people won't ever allow something approaching complete understanding of his work. I think it is possible that someday his books can be read with either a precise or intuitive understanding of what he intended with each and every passage. I admit that is my goal, anyway. I am currently most mystified by the five coffin conundrum discussed in the Two Tombs thread.

Anyway,

Regarding Gene Wolfe faced with certain questions in interviews, Dan'l writes:

How shall I put this... Wolfe is sometimes a bit, ahhh, _disingenuous_ about such things.

I think I will disagree, based on this and similar examples:

JJ: Many of your books, particularly the Latro and Briah books, portray a dimly-seen conflict or at >least interaction of "higher powers" that is in part "behind" the human events. One sees the same >kind of thing in the Book of Daniel, chapter 11, and also in the Iliad. I'm wondering about the

origin of this interesting theme in your writing, how you came to think of writing this way.

GW: No comment.

That's it. No pithy, convoluted, misleading answer to what I think is too penetrating a question, simply.. "No comment".

I get the impression, from all his writing and interviews, that Gene Wolfe has certain principles he adheres to, and one of those is that tricksterism and manipulation is okay in artistic creation but not personal conduct. His favored characters are all rather honest and plain spoken, while characters like Agia think sideways and are always creating puzzles for others.

Tony Ellis responds to my:

The only other place I know of in BoTNS where an Earth book is quoted is L. Carroll's *Through The Looking Glass*...

with

Here's another for your collection, then: in *The Sword of the Lictor*, chapter XXXV, Dr Talos alludes to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

I checked chapter 35 and I think Tony refers to Talos' line- "The castle? The monster? The man of learning? I only just thought of it. Surely you know that just as the momentous events of the past cast their shadows down the ages, so now, when the sun is drawing toward the dark, our own shadows race into the past to trouble mankind's dreams"

I have previously said I think Baldanders and Talos are a sly Wolfe allusion to Mary Shelley, a reverse *Frankenstein* where a monster creates a doctor.

But I think Talos' statement refers to the legend Llibio has recently told Severian, about a small man from the south and the building of the castle and an evil giant, a legend which Severian has just told Talos. If Talos was really referring directly to the *Frankenstein* book then he is saying the Baldanders story travelled back in time to Mary Shelly; then we are again saying Earth is in the past of Urth.

Dan'I mentions the Neil Armstrong picture as an iteration of the same picture in our own Urth cycle. I interpret it differently. I think the picture and the twisted Earth stories on Urth are a result of the occasional direct contact between Urth and Earth through mirrors or Jungle Huts. I think Father Inire/Isangoma and Jonas are the primary characters where we see examples of this and the Armstrong painting is one more by Fechin/Inire.

Sidenote question- Could sad old slender Jonas, riding his little merychip and hopelessly pursuing the haughty Jolenta be an allusion to Don Quixote, riding his nasty horse, Rocinante and pursuing the haughty Dulcinea? Severian doesn't make a good Sancho Panza I suppose.

-bsharp

Jeff Wilson — 20 Jul 2006, 07:21 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

On 7/18/06, b sharp <bsharp@flat at hotmail.com> wrote:

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That is,

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IIRC, he says it takes place "perhaps a million years" in the future, but the "perhaps" releases him from any responsibility of accuracy. The Stone Town certainly would not last a million years. Meanwhile, some constellations from our time remain recognizable in the sky, restricting the time frame to within a few dozen millennia or so.

Earth is definitely in Urth's future. The unique event called the Incarnation happens in the Earth-cycle, and has not yet happened in the Urth-cycle.

I don't think that is supportable; IIRC, the Pelerines retain the cross in their iconography, the Brown Book contains both a distorted account of the US Civil War battle between the Monitor and the Merrimac and an adaptation of Kipling. The picture gallery contains a photograph of the very Catholic Buzz Aldrin, taker of the first Communion on another world.

It's also possible that GW changed his mind since publication. "G.W." in SHADOW's back matter writes as if not only is Urth the same as Earth, but that several buildings today are still standing in that era.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 Jul 2006, 17:34 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 7/20/06, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
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I didn't say the Crucifixion hadn't occurred.

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"G.W." in SHADOW's back matter writes as if not only is Urth the same as Earth, but that several buildings today are still standing in that era.

An interesting interpretation. The exact quote is:

"To those who have preceded me in the study of the posthistoric world, and particularly to those collectors -- too numerous to name here -- who have permitted me to examine artifacts surviving so many centuries of futurity, and most especially to those who have allowed

me to visit and photograph the era's few extant buildings,
I am truly grateful."

There's a huge ambiguity in this. On the one hand, he's talking about "futurity" (and indeed he says earlier that he translated Severian's book from "a tongue that has not yet achieved existence"); on the other hand, he talks about surviving artifacts and buildings from that era in our day. I see two consistent ways to interpret this.

The first is that some objects move backwards in time and age in that direction. Certainly I can't disprove this from the text, but neither do I see any support for it anywhere outside the works of T.H. White.

The second is that the iterations of Briah are so exact that things like Kipling, the Crucifixion, and the Civil War all took place more or less as they did in our world. This in and of itself doesn't strike me as any more unlikely than that the universe cycles at all; and indeed, if the purpose of the iteration is to prepare a world in which the Incarnation can take place, then it's likely that the next-to-last "draft" would be quite close to the final work. What does concern me is the implication that some artifacts and even buildings have somehow survived the Grand Gnab-Big Bang pair that connects Severian's iteration to ours: but given that Severian's ms. does, the rest isn't beyond the pale.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.

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Jeff Wilson — 21 Jul 2006, 17:17 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

On 7/20/06, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

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If there was no Incarnation, who was Crucified?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 21 Jul 2006, 18:22 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

If there was no Incarnation, who was Crucified?

The son of Joseph and Mary, who was both enlightened and possessed by the Outsider.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

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Jeff Wilson — 22 Jul 2006, 03:34 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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The son of Joseph and Mary, who was both enlightened
and possessed by the Outsider.

How can we tell the difference?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 22 Jul 2006, 06:51 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 7/21/06, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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The son of Joseph and Mary, who was both enlightened
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How can we tell the difference?

Since it's fiction, we don't have to 8*)

Frankly, I think Wolfe kind of wrote himself into a corner here -- by having Urth's history _so_ parallel to Earths, he put himself in a position where there _had_ to be something indistinguishable from the Christian Church. But the Incarnation has to be an _utterly_ unique event (says Christian theology). So the "man possessed and enlightened by the Outsider" who winds up getting crucified (in Silk's vision) is historically indistinguishable from the Theanthropos...

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 22 Jul 2006, 16:55 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Sat, 22 Jul 2006 16:51:16 +1000 Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

<danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

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"Theanthropos" is tricky. I think it is only used by Agia, in the jungle hut scee.

As far as I know, the usual Chalcedonian term is actually "Theanthropos". Is Wolfe making some
kind of statement, putting the former in bad-girl Agia's mouth?

At the risk of making a lot out of nothing much, perhaps her term should be read as "Theo-Anthropos", man-as-god, rather than the orthodox "both-man-and-god" (or whatever: I don't pretend to really understand the orthodox concept). Kind of appropriate for her, if you believe (as I tend to) that she's connected to the black magicians.

That aside, my pet theory conforms to some of Dan'l's views; the universe of NS had no Jesus. For an orthodox Christian, the incarnation must surely be a unique event, changing everything. God is outside, in NS; when he incarnates and enters inside, it must change everything. Not least, it must end the whole cycle of universes, and fix one - ours - as the only reality, now with a definite beginning & definite end.

I differ from Dan'l in thinking that Silk's universe is in fact ours; the Outsider whispering in Silk's ears on the ballcourt is the echo of the incarnation, out of the distant past, but (I like to think) happening at the same instant from the Outsider's extra- universal point of view. So I think Silk sees the actual, unique Jesus in his visions.

When Silk meets Sev, it is not in the universe of NS, but in this new one, in which Sev's future will differ radically from the NS story.

Anyway, it makes sense to me :)

don doggett — 22 Jul 2006, 17:26 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

--- thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

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Perhaps that is what Inire meant in his letter to Sev.
about convincing his cousins (other hierodules) to
support them in particular. That passage has always
been puzzling to me. Sorry I don't have my books to
point it out, but it's right after Severian becomes
autarch.

Don

Jeff Wilson — 22 Jul 2006, 22:24 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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Revelations provides for at least a second Incarnation. Meanwhile, the scripturally unique Flood *is* duplicated by the author.

So the "man possessed and enlightened by the Outsider" who winds up getting crucified (in Silk's vision) is historically indistinguishable from the Theanthropos...

That sounds too close to a suggestion that belief in Christ's divine nature is unnecessary to have been intentional on Gene Wolfe's part.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Jul 2006, 04:48 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

bsharp wrote:
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[snip]

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There are other Earth books quoted in the Urth Cycle. lirc, someone, somewhere, has listed them. Mantis mentions the line from Marlowe's FAUSTUS (CLAW, chapter XXVIII) in the "brown book" entry in his LEXICON URTHUS, as well as an URTH quote from Genesis 37:9.

-Roy

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 23 Jul 2006, 05:41 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

That's a really interesting take. I like it. I'll have to give it some thought.

On 7/22/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

On Sat, 22 Jul 2006 16:51:16 +1000 Dan'I Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

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Anyway, it makes sense to me :)

Chris — 23 Jul 2006, 10:06 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

But if I recall correctly the scriptures of Silk's church have all been lifted by Typhon from previous religions. And it seems to me there were snippets of new testament passages in there.

That's a really interesting take. I like it. I'll have to give it some thought.

On 7/22/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

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At the risk of making a lot out of nothing much, perhaps her term should be read as "Theo-Anthropos", man-as-god, rather than the orthodox "both-man-and-god" (or whatever: I don't pretend to really understand the orthodox concept). Kind of appropriate for her, if you believe (as I tend to) that she's connected to the black magicians.

That aside, my pet theory conforms to some of Dan'l's views; the universe of NS had no Jesus. For an orthodox Christian, the incarnation must surely be a unique event, changing everything. God is outside, in NS; when he incarnates and enters inside, it must change everything. Not least, it must end the whole cycle of universes, and fix one - ours - as the only reality, now with a definite beginning & definite end.

I differ from Dan'l in thinking that Silk's universe is in fact ours; the Outsider whispering in Silk's ears on the ballcourt is the echo of the incarnation, out of the distant past, but (I like to think) happening at the same instant from the Outsider's extra-universal point of view. So I think Silk sees the actual, unique Jesus in his visions.

When Silk meets Sev, it is not in the universe of NS, but in this new one, in which Sev's future will differ radically from the NS story.

Anyway, it makes sense to me :)

Roy writes:

There are other Earth books quoted in the Urth Cycle. Iirc, someone, somewhere, has listed >them. Mantis mentions the line from Marlowe's FAUSTUS (CLAW, chapter XXVIII) in the "brown >book" entry in his LEXICON URTHUS, as well as an URTH quote from Genesis 37:9.

Any further help in finding the list would be appreciated. Genesis 37:9 is about Joseph and reads:

Then he had another dream, and this one, too, he told to his brothers. "I had another dream," he >said; "this time, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

I can't even find that in Urth. It surely is important. Help!

-bsharp

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 23 Jul 2006, 17:06 · in reply to Chris

On 7/23/06, Chris <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:
But if I recall correctly the scriptures of Silk's church have all been lifted by Typhon from previous religions. And it seems to me there were snippets of new testament passages in there.

I definitely recall an OT passage -- the one Oreb's name is taken from. Can't think of a NT passage, but it's been a couple of years.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>
"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.
However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Jul 2006, 18:22 · follows b sharp

bsharp wrote:
Genesis 37:9 is
about Joseph and reads:

Then he had another dream, and this one, too, he told to his brothers. "I had another dream," he >said; "this time, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

I can't even find that in Urth. It surely is important. Help!

Page 267. This line immediately follows the biblical quote:

"Its words show plainly how much wiser the peoples of ages long past were than we are now; not for nothing is that book titled _The Book of the Wonders of Urth and Sky_."

Severian had memorized the entire brown book. His words indicate to me that Earth is unquestionably in Urth's past.

-Roy