

Severian as Savior; Destruction Of Urth As Redemptive Act?

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 20 Aug 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4694>

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Jack Redelfs — 20 Aug 2006, 20:57

I've only posted once or twice in the past few years of reading this list, I've only posted once or twice, but for some reason I caught the bug today.

Here's a statement by Adam Stephanides:

Severian in UotNS and Latro in SOLDIER OF ARETE both go through periods of severe depression; Severian is near-suicidal iirc, although this isn't too surprising since he's just caused the death of billions of people.

Time after time this event (the destruction of Urth and the concurrent renewal of Ushas) seems to be viewed by readers as a holocaust, wholly dark in impact, or at the very least morally weird and perplexing.

I got a very different impression on reading UOTNS. In my reading, Severian may have killed billions of people, but it was a justifiable "cracking of eggs" in order to bring about a righteous purpose. The ultimate outcome was not just redemptive for the aging sun, but for humanity as a whole.

From my reading, the destruction of Urth was righteous for two reasons:

1) Most importantly, it was a moral redemption. After all, life without honor is a living death.

2) It was a physical redemption, preserving the bloodlines of Urth. Immediate trauma is preferable to eventual extinction. Humanity was trapped on Urth (although probably by choice) and the sun was fading very fast. True, Severian has the ability to escape by various means, but he seems a special case. Despite the ephemeral presence of cacogens, there was nowhere for Jonas and co. to dock, and no more Whorls in the making.

Assumption no. 1 deserves more explanation.

In *The Claw Of The Conciliator*, Wolfe states that, just as the brutes that attack Severian in the underground stream have become warped by their long sojourn in darkness, so has humanity become twisted by the fading of the sun[1]. Observe Urth's casual acceptance of torture, public execution, prostitution, dictatorship. It's a brutal worldview that most of the characters seem to share. Severian is often called an anti-hero for his occasionally cruel behavior, but in this regard I see him as merely a man of his times (In any case, I think Sev's sin is often overemphasized over his kindness - especially by himself. Like many of Wolfe's protagonists, Severian's humble nature verges on a crisis of confidence).

Just as commoners and gentry alike speak in genteel language, while engaging in horrid cruelties, so does Urth seem like a parody of Earth, an ornate collection of lies. Or, if you will, a

painted sepulchre rotten on the inside.

If Wolfe is a good Christian he accepts the Judaeo-Christian belief that, just as God gives life, it is his to take away (Is it Pindaros, in SOTM, who states "we universally recognize the right of Gods to slaughter men as men slaughter beasts" — An archaic idea, but fully acceptable to Christianity). Hence the rightness of a redemptive flood, to sweep away a corrupt system and replace it with a clean slate.

Am I misreading the text in seeing the flooding of Urth as painful but necessary for the moral and physical health of the human race?

[1] I don't have a reference, but it was a discussion between Severian and Jonas, perhaps immediately after Severian captured, than freed Agia, a one of his many humane acts.

Roy C. Lackey — 21 Aug 2006, 06:03 · follows Jack Redelfs

Jack Redelfs wrote:

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Then you won't agree with Wright's ATTENDING DAEDALUS. <g>

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The "Ice Future" would take a long time to come about. But no matter what happened to Urth, mankind had already spread, minimally, all across the galaxy. Ushas was not necessary to the survival of the species.

-Roy

Matthew DeLuca — 21 Aug 2006, 17:52 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Yea but wasn't Severian's Ushas supposed to reconcile the sins of the previous human race that had damaged the universe ?

On Aug 21, 2006, at 2:03 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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