

Thecla's fourth book

The Urth list — 10 messages, 6 voices, 30 Sep 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4724>

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Roy C. Lackey — 30 Sep 2006, 06:16

b sharp, a few weeks ago, wrote:

He [Talos] seems to understand Urth to Ushas better than anyone else. How does he know about the woman on the Path of Air?<<

Talos's play bears only a superficial resemblance to the actual events related in URTH concerning the end of Urth.

Logically, there is no way that Talos could have known about her. I think this is one of those situations where the sequel to NEW SUN doesn't mesh perfectly with the original tetralogy. We all know that when Wolfe wrote NEW SUN he didn't plan on writing URTH. It seems to me that once the decision to write Book 5 was made, Wolfe was forced to flesh out to some degree what was present only skeletally in his mind. I think he found it necessary to make some changes to his original concept.

One place where this is evident is the last line of CITADEL. Severian, just before leaving Urth for Yesod, wrote that he was writing in what would be "the last year of the old sun." That turned out not to be true. For whatever reason, in URTH Wolfe made life go on on Urth for another forty years before the coming of the New Sun and the flood.

Another change seems to concern the author of one of the four books Thecla requested from the library, the book we are told the least about. That book is never named in NEW SUN, but it is named in the last paragraph of the essay "Books in _The Book of the New Sun_" in PLAN[E]T ENGINEERING. It is

The Book of the New Sun. That essay concludes: "For the library of Master Ultan is in _The Book of the New Sun_, and _The Book of the New Sun_ is in his library. And you are the readers of that book."

Not really. That essay was written in 1984, after the publication of NEW SUN but before URTH was written. Evidently Wolfe found reason to change his mind. A paradox doesn't bother Wolfe, judging from the flippant definition of the word he gave in OTTER, but maybe he had second thoughts about Thecla (and Severian) reading and studying a book that had not yet been written, Severian's own _The Book of the New Sun_. Ultan and his library are indeed in Severian's book -- but so are the chapters dealing with Thecla sitting in a cell studying that book, which also relates her torture and death and Severian's complicity in same. The book also affords Severian a blueprint of his near future. We have been "the readers of that book."

Whatever Wolfe's motive, in URTH he created a new character who is the author of a second book with the same title as Severian's original book. After being sent from Yesod to Typhon's era to establish the Conciliator legend, Severian entertained some of his followers in his cell:

"Declan wished to know how Urth would fare when the New Sun came; and I, understanding little more than he did himself, drew upon Dr. Talos's play, never thinking that in a time yet to come Dr. Talos's

play would be drawn from my words." (URTH, 266)

Canog, in the next cell, overheard this speech, took notes and eventually wrote a little book he called The Book of the New Sun. That is the book of that title that Thecla read in her cell. Neither Ultan nor his library were mentioned in Severian's little sermon. They were not mentioned in Canog's book. None of us have read that book and I don't expect we ever will.

Many centuries later, Talos read Canog's book and based his play on it. We have a closed circle of causality in which none of the three men involved were the original source, each citing one of the others as his source. Severian's words were based on Talos's play; the play was based on Canog's book and the book was based on Severian's words.

And the mysterious woman on the Path of Air was outside that loop. Severian saw her only after returning from Typhon's era to his own on the last day of Urth. She wasn't in either Severian's or Canog's The Book of the New Sun.

Wolfe could easily have avoided this situation by simply omitting the Path of Air scene in URTH. After all, there is a lot of other nonsense in the play that does not correspond to what actually happened just before the arrival of the New Sun. I'm missing something here.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 Sep 2006, 06:46 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 9/29/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

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True; but there is no way that Severian could have known that when he finished writing his account. While I'm not arguing that Wolfe did know, if he did there would have been no reason for him not to end CITADEL in exactly the same way.

Just pickin' nits like a good primate...

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

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

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.

- Mel Brooks

James B. Jordan — 01 Oct 2006, 13:15 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

At 01:16 AM 9/30/2006, you wrote:

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I've been way too busy to keep up here, but I did catch this. If it is really 40 years, then Wolfe has a basis in the New Testament. The Old Creation ended in AD 30, at Pentecost, but did not fully end until the Cataclysm (Flood, the Bible does call it that) in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem, centre of the Olde Order. There is a two-stage ending, for a variety of reasons into which I need not go. Suffice to say that Wolfe may have had something like this in mind, or might call on it if you pressed him !! :-[Severian (type of Jesus) made king in "30" and world ends fully in "70".

JBJordan.

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Roy C. Lackey — 01 Oct 2006, 19:26 · follows James B. Jordan

JBJordan quoted and wrote:

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Well, Severian was writing ten years after he became autarch. So the gap between his becoming "king" and the "Cataclysm" was actually fifty years for those who remained on Urth. I guess you could get around that by saying that he didn't really become "king" when he became

autarch; rather, he became "king" when he decided to go to Yesod as Urth's Epitome.

-Roy

b sharp — 02 Oct 2006, 11:27 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Josh Young writes:

I don't think there is a paradox here. I seem to remember Sev setting a copy of his >memoirs "Adrift on the sea of time." in UotNS. I always assumed that it wound up, either by >coincidence or providence in Urth of the pastand was found and subsequently read.

The paradox is in causality, as Roy outlined. We have Severian's spoken words inspiring Canog's Book of the New Sun which inspires Talos' outrageous and distorted play which inspires Severian's spoken word. A closed loop, which would be okay in the science fiction world except for the glitch of Flood Day information which is included in Talos' play. Where does it come from? Severian doesn't know about Flood Day when he speaks and Canog hears.

Now, there is Urth of the New Sun which is also a journal, written by Severian. Somehow it exists somewhere/when for Gene Wolfe to find and translate. It has the details of Flood Day in it, including minor details (major in regard to Severian's family tree I think) like the woman on the Path Of Air. Somehow this information was inserted into the closed loop. Did Canog find Urth of the New Sun and insert its information into his book? (if so, he also found himself in that book).

It seems more likely that Dr. Talos found Urth of the New Sun and inserted that stuff into his play. If Dr. Talos had read Book of the New Sun he would have found himself there and would know exactly what would happen to Baldanders and him (in Urth he appears only as an eidolon on Yesod). It seems more likely that Talos has read only Urth of the New Sun not Book of the New Sun.

I still have trouble seeing how Canog could write such a detailed book, in first person, based only on Severian's spoken words. Perhaps he found Severian's version of Book Of the New Sun and re-wrote it? I also have trouble seeing how Thecla could have chosen that book. If she had read it before, she would have known her own fate. If she was only requesting it because someone recommended it...who would that person be? And why would that person want Thecla to read about her own fate? Or chance Severian finding his own book or...etc. etc.

All in all I feel forced to the conclusion that Wolfe was playing fast and loose when he dealt out this particular deck of cards.

-bsharp

James B. Jordan — 02 Oct 2006, 12:56 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

At 02:26 PM 10/1/2006, you wrote:

JBJordan quoted and wrote:

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Well, Severian was writing ten years after he became autarch. So the gap between his becoming "king" and the "Cataclysm" was actually fifty years for those who remained on Urth. I guess you could get around that by saying that he didn't really become "king" when he became autarch; rather, he became "king" when he decided to go to Yesod as Urth's Epitome.

-Roy

At his "ascension" so to speak? Naw. If it's 50 years, then my suggestion falls, and the original suggestion that Wolfe changed some details remains.

Patera Nutria

Adrian Robert — 02 Oct 2006, 12:56 · in reply to b sharp

On Oct 2, 2006, at 7:27 AM, b sharp wrote:

I still have trouble seeing how Canog could write such a detailed book, in first person, based only on Severian's spoken words.

Embellishment? (Marco Polo's "Travels", anyone?) As far as the unexpected yet coming-to-pass incident of the flood, this could be drawn from the collective unconscious (either — la Jung or Mr. Clarke, _Childhood's End_). Or simply consciously extrapolated -- some form of destruction occurs, fire and water are the chief candidates..

Regarding the creation of the tale itself in a closed loop, we are told time is a river, and rivers have eddies. This analogy seems not a stretch in the context of Severian's own semi-looping, semi-linear travels through time.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 02 Oct 2006, 16:48 · in reply to b sharp

On 10/2/06, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

I still have trouble seeing how Canog could write such a detailed book, in first person, based only on Severian's spoken words.

I always assumed that Canog was prophetically inspired, or the equivalent thereof...

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

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

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.

- Mel Brooks

Roy C. Lackey — 03 Oct 2006, 16:51 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

bsharp wrote:

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first person, based only on Severian's spoken words. Perhaps he found Severian's version of Book Of the New Sun and re-wrote it? I also have trouble seeing how Thecla could have chosen that book. If she had read it before, she would have known her own fate. If she was only requesting it because someone recommended it...who would that person be? And why would that person want Thecla to read about her own fate? Or chance Severian finding his own book or...etc. etc.

Severian did not speak, in Canog's hearing, of his life before going to Yesod and winning a New Sun, of his rise from apprentice to autarch. He spoke as the Conciliator. He talked to his followers about the dying sun and the eventual arrival of a New Sun. Canog's book in no way duplicated or rehashed what Severian had written in his own first manuscript of the same title.

Wolfe said in "Books in _The Book of the New Sun_" that the four books were ones "Thecla might reasonably ask to borrow". She suddenly found herself in a bad situation, so she sought help from whatever quarter she thought would do the most good. Wolfe said that she wanted the genealogy folio because the influence of her relatives represented her best chance of release. She also turned to religion. The small green book with the enameled pictures was a collection of devotions, and _The Book of the New Sun_ told the story of "the Conciliator, an intercessor and mediator". The brown book no doubt also contained stories told by ("The Tale of the Town that Forgot Fauna") or about the Conciliator.

(Thecla was in the ironic position [though neither she nor her lover were aware of it; at least I don't think he was aware] of praying for help from the medium of the Conciliator who had been and would yet come to be, the same boy-toy who brought her the books and who would be instrumental in her death, the god who came to Urth in Typhon's time and who contained her memories and some degree of her personality. She sought release and I guess she got what she prayed for -- sort of.)

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 03 Oct 2006, 21:52 · follows Roy C. Lackey

I think it's kind of interesting that "The Gospel of Sev" was set down by a Raskolnikov figure who thought it made a cute story - not by a devout disciple type.