

# \_Dhalgren\_: Scathing Towards Women? and a few ?'s about Sev

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 23 Oct 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4747>

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Jack Redelfs — 23 Oct 2006, 04:19

Dan'I, I read \_Dhalgren\_ just a couple of years ago, and I seem to recall that all or most of the female characters were objectified, scorned and degraded in one way or another. I don't remember any outright rape, but that's not requisite for a hateful attitude towards women.

\_Dhalgren\_ is supposedly famous for being easy to start, tough to finish, and I know I almost quit a couple of times. I don't know if I've ever read a long novel that was so inconsistent. He wrote the first chapter in an impressive stream-of-consciousness style, only to abandon it entirely (except for a brief encore at the end), unless you count the bizarre monologues. I lost track of how many times he'd introduce a few characters and a new plot, only to abandon everything and write 50 pages of pornography, or 50 pages of rambling semi-coherent monologue. It's a weird book, but not weird-good. I think It may well have been condemned to obscurity if not for the naughty bits. It's probably one of the worst novels I ever completed. A 250 page condensed version would likely be solid, though no \_Babel-17\_. Maybe "Reader's Digest" could be interested in the undertaking? \*grin\*

Dan'I:

Actually, there are passages where various characters deliver homilies. Silk does it a \_lot\_ in LONG SUN.

You're right, of course. His characters do moralize, as people are wont to do, but I think Wolfe does a good job of leaving a bit of doubt about who's acting as the authorial mouthpiece. Sure, Silk may show a lot of wisdom, but within definite limits. The mere thought of Hyacinth turns him into a quivering schoolboy, and his moral center is defined by devotion to a absurd religion that worships feuding videogame deities - plus it only recently quit sacrificing humans, and for the wrong reason at that.

On an unrelated note, let me throw out a question that has always intrigued me. Sometimes Severian was able to heal with the Claw, sometimes not. Did we ever figure out what criteria determined his success or failure? Toward the close of \_Citadel\_, in one of Wolfe's fuzziest Hallmark moments, Sev realizes that the claw is just a common thorn, and that "the power was inside me all along! I healed Triskele!"

Was the power specific to Sev as the Conciliator, or just general divine (or Hierogrammatic, if you want to be SFnal) power accessible to any old

body?

Either way, you'd think that afterwards he would heal people by simply laying his hands on them or something. Why didn't he ever do this?

I seem to remember an idea that Sev dying for the first time in *\_Shadow Of The Torturer\_*, drowning in the Gyoll. Is this theory strongly supported by the text or is it just wild conjecture? If it's a good theory, it means Sev was an aquastor throughout. Did "the Claw's" healing power come from the fact that Sev was an aquastor? Is that the SFnal justification?

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 23 Oct 2006, 16:44 · in reply to Jack Redelfs

Jack having written...

On an unrelated note, let me throw out a question that has always intrigued me. Sometimes Severian was able to heal with the Claw, sometimes not. Did we ever figure out what criteria determined his success or failure?

There are theories. I incline to the theory that he could not heal anyone whose nature was "mixed," like Jonas (cyborg), probably because that would make them unclean in the OT sense.

Toward the close of *\_Citadel\_*, in one of Wolfe's fuzziest Hallmark moments, Sev realizes that the claw is just a common thorn, and that "the power was inside me all along! I healed Triskele!"

I think this is unfair to one of GW's most powerful moments. "I took off my boots and threw them into the water, so as not to walk shod upon sacred ground." He clearly is not having some revalation about *\_himself\_*.

Was the power specific to Sev as the Conciliator, or just general divine (or Hierogrammatic, if you want to be SFnal) power accessible to any old body?

Have you read *\_Urth of the New Sun\_*? It defines rather clearly where the power actually came from.

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Don't know.

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Noooooooo.....

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

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<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

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James Crossley — 23 Oct 2006, 21:05 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On 10/23/06 9:44 AM, "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

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Dan'I's question reminded me of something I've been wanting to ask the list at large--who, if anyone, besides me finds BotNS more satisfying without the fifth volume? I prefer the suggestiveness of not knowing all the explanations provided in *\_Urth\_*, and judging by Wolfe's accounts of how he came to write that last piece, it seems he would have been content to let the tetralogy stand alone. I think it's only the perceived demands of the genre audience that brought *\_Urth\_* into existence; the publishers of literary fiction are more generally tolerant of open-ended conclusions. Thoughts?

Delurking,  
James

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Allan Anderson — 23 Oct 2006, 21:31 · in reply to James Crossley

I've only read "Urth" once, but I recall not enjoying it as much as the BotNS. So I think I'm in your camp. But I'll go take another look!

James Crossley wrote:

On 10/23/06 9:44 AM, "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 23 Oct 2006, 21:40 · in reply to James Crossley

James,

I disliked "Urth" at first, for much the same reasons you suggest. I thought it, well, \_unnecessary\_.

And perhaps it is unnecessary: but thanks to others on this list (especially Alga, whose absence in recent times I greatly regret), I reread it and was far more impressed. It does explain much that the tetralogy proper leaves only suggested; but it also adds new questions, and indeed seems to introduce some paradoxes, points that are quite hard to resolve both with itself and with \_tBotNS\_.

One possibility, of course, is that \_Urth\_ isn't written by "the same" Severian (I will do no more than put it in quotes, so as not to spoil things for those who have not yet read it) who wrote the \_Book\_, but I find that unsatisfactory on a number of levels...

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

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Bob Miller — 24 Oct 2006, 00:34 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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I loved Urth, but for different reasons than I loved BotNS. BotNS was almost incredibly rich without being boring. This is more than very difficult. BotNS was actionpacked and still gave the sense of being a morality fable like Silverlock and <hmmm> Ralph Bakshi's Coonskin? Urth was meeting an old friend I'd thought I'd lost and learning interesting things about him/it that I didn't know before. Some authors--read all these long series making yawns of the past 2 decades would still be milking this milieu. After all, there's an awful lot there to milk.

I think, whatever Himself says, that Urth forced itself out of his mind in a manner perhaps reminiscent of the birth of Venus, and perhaps for the same reason. To get her off his mind.

Enjoy